

Vizetelly's
Sixpenny Series



THE
DETECTIVE'S
EYE

BY

F. DU BOISGOBEY.



of Amusing and
Entertaining Books.

ROWLAND'S MACASSAR OIL

is the best and safest preserver and beautifier of the hair; it contains no lead or mineral ingredients and can also be had in a *golden colour* for fair-haired children. Avoid cheap rancid oils, and buy only ROWLAND'S MACASSAR OIL. 3/6, 7/-, 10/6, and 21/-.

ROWLAND'S ODONTO

is the best tooth powder, and contains no gritty or acid substances which ruin the enamel; it whitens the teeth, polishes and preserves the enamel, prevents decay, and gives a pleasing fragrance to the breath; it is the original and only genuine Odonto.

ROW KAL

is the safest preparation, as it contains no lead or mineral ingredients and is perfectly harmless; it eradicates freckles, redness, chaps, the effects of cold weather, and leaves the skin soft, smooth and white.

ZOLA'S

With numerous Pages
HIS MASTERPIECE
THE LADIES' FAVORITE
Sequel to Piping Hot
RUSH FOR THE
Curée).

GEO. REES

By DE NEUVILLE, ED. DETAILLE, R. CATON WOODVILLE,
MRS. BUTLER, &c. From 21s. each.

GEO. REES' SPORTING PICTURES.

HUNTING, RACING, COACHING, &c., &c. In Sets of 6 for 25s. all
Coloured by Hand.

GEO. REES' ENGRAVINGS.

By SIR J. MILLAIS, SIR F. LEIGHTON, ALMA TADEMA, BRITON
RIVIERE, &c. From 21s. each.

GEO. REES' ETCHINGS.

By WALTNER, CARL HEFFNER, F. DICKSEE, F. SLOCOMBE,
P. RAJON, &c. From 21s. each.

A LARGE ASSORTMENT ALWAYS ON VIEW AND FOR SELECTION.

115, STRAND, corner of SAVOY ST.; & 41-3, RUSSELL ST., COVENT GARDEN.

(B)

ROBERT W. WOODRUFF
LIBRARY
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



EMORY UNIVERSITY

ROWLAND'S NIA

is the best in three tints, warranted free from lead; 2/6 per box. Buy for ROWLAND'S London, and avoid other names.

NOVELS.

With Illustrations, 5s.

IN.

Master and Man.

Pot-Bouille).

DIR." — NANA.

PICTURES.

In small post 8vo, ornamental scarlet covers, 1s. each.

THE GABORIAU AND DU BOISGOBEY SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

"Ah, friend, how many and many a while
They've made the slow time fleetly flow,
And solaced pain and charmed exile,
BOISGOBEY and GABORIAU!"

Ballade of Railway Novels in "Longman's Magazine."

IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE.

"A story of thrilling interest, and admirably translated."—*Sunday Times*.

"Hardly ever has a more ingenious circumstantial case been imagined than that which puts the hero in peril of his life, and the manner in which the proof of his innocence is finally brought about is scarcely less skilful."—*Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*.

THE LEROUGE CASE.

"M. Gaboriau is a skilful and brilliant writer, capable of so diverting the attention and interest of his readers that not one word or line in his book will be skipped or read carelessly."—*Hampshire Advertiser*.

OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY.

"The interest is kept up throughout, and the story is told graphically and with a good deal of art."—*London Figaro*.

LECOQ THE DETECTIVE. Two Vols.

"In the art of forging a tangled chain of complicated incidents involved and inexplicable until the last link is reached and the whole made clear, Mr. Wilkie Collins is equalled, if not excelled, by M. Gaboriau."—*Brighton Herald*.

THE GILDED CLIQUE.

"Full of incident, and instinct with life and action. Altogether this is a most fascinating book."—*Hampshire Advertiser*.

THE MYSTERY OF ORCIVAL.

"The Author keeps the interest of the reader at fever heat, and by a succession of unexpected turns and incidents, the drama is ultimately worked out to a very pleasant result. The ability displayed is unquestionable."—*Sheffield Independent*.

DOSSIER NO. 113.

"The plot is worked out with great skill, and from first to last the reader's interest is never allowed to flag."—*Dumbarton Herald*.

THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES.

THE SLAVES OF PARIS. Two Vols.

"Sensational, full of interest, cleverly conceived, and wrought out with consummate skill."—*Oxford and Cambridge Journal*.

THE CATASTROPHE. Two Vols.

"A plot vigorously and skilfully constructed, leading through a series of surprising dramatic scenes and thrilling mysteries, and culminating in a sudden and complete exposure of crime and triumph of innocence. 'The Catastrophe' does ample credit to M. Gaboriau's reputation as a novelist of vast resource in incident and of wonderful ingenuity in constructing and unravelling thrilling mysteries."—*Aberdeen Journal*.

INTRIGUES OF A POISONER.

"The wonderful Sensational Novels of Emile Gaboriau."—*Globe*.

THE COUNT'S MILLIONS. Two Vols.

"To those who love the mysterious and the sensational, Gaboriau's stories are irresistibly fascinating. His marvellously clever pages hold the mirror up to nature with absolute fidelity; and the interest with which he contrives to invest his characters proves that exaggeration is unnecessary to a master."—*Society*.

THE OLD AGE OF LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE. Two Vols.

"The romances of Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey picture the marvellous Lecoq and other wonders of shrewdness, who piece together the elaborate details of the most complicated crimes, as Professor Owen with the smallest bone as a foundation could reconstruct the most extraordinary animals."—*Standard*.

IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.

"This is a most picturesque, dramatic, and powerful sensational novel. Its interest never flags. Its terrific excitement continues to the end. The reader is kept spell-bound."—*Oldham Chronicle*.

THE DAY OF RECKONING. Two Vols.

"M. du Boisgobey gives us no tiresome descriptions or laboured analyses of character; under his facile pen plots full of incident are quickly opened and unwound. He does not stop to moralise; all his art consists in creating intricacies which shall keep the reader's curiosity on the stretch, and offer a full scope to his own really wonderful ingenuity for unravelling."—*Times*.

THE SEVERED HAND.

"The plot is a marvel of intricacy and cleverly managed surprises."—*Literary World*.

"Readers who like a thoroughly entangled and thrilling plot will welcome this novel with avidity."—*Bristol Mercury*.

BERTHA'S SECRET.

"'Bertha's Secret' is a most effective romance. We need not say how the story ends, for this would spoil the reader's pleasure in a novel which depends for all its interest on the skilful weaving and unweaving of mysteries, but we will repeat that 'Bertha's Secret' is very well worth perusal."—*Times*.

WHO DIED LAST? OR THE RIGHTFUL HEIR.

"Travellers at this season of the year will find the time occupied by a long journey pass away as rapidly as they can desire with one of Du Boisgobey's absorbing volumes in their hand."—*London Figaro*.

THE CRIME OF THE OPERA HOUSE. Two Vols.

"We are led breathless from the first page to the last, and close the book with a thorough admiration for the vigorous romancist who has the courage to fulfil the true function of the story-teller, by making reflection subordinate to action."—*Aberdeen Journal*.

Lately published Volumes.

THE MATAPAN AFFAIR.

A FIGHT FOR A FORTUNE.

THE GOLDEN PIG; OR, THE IDOL OF MODERN PARIS. 2 Vols.

To be followed by

THE THUMB STROKE.

THE CORAL PIN. Two Vols.

*Vizetelly's Sixpenny Series of Amusing and
Entertaining Books.*

X.

THE DETECTIVE'S EYE.

VIZETELLY'S SIXPENNY SERIES OF AMUSING AND
ENTERTAINING BOOKS.

ILLUSTRATED WITH MANY ENGRAVINGS.
MATRIMONY BY ADVERTISEMENT,
AND OTHER ADVENTURES OF A JOURNALIST.

By CHARLES G. PAYNE.

Including the Author's experiences in a Madhouse as an "Amateur Maniac," and on a Hansom as an "Amateur Cabby," as well as the details of a pretended search for a wife through the agency of the Matrimonial Journals, and other amusing articles.

"These startling adventures of a journalist, related in robust literary style, make one of the liveliest little volumes now on sale at the bookstalls."—*Life*.

COPIOUSLY ILLUSTRATED.
VOTE FOR POTTLEBECK:

THE STORY OF A POLITICIAN IN LOVE.

By CHARLES G. PAYNE.

"Mr. Payne tells this story as he tells all his stories, in a peculiarly racy fashion."—*Chester Chronicle*.

"Cleverly written throughout, bits of pathos mingling with broad humour."—*Freeman's Journal*.

CECILE'S FORTUNE. By F. Du BOISGOBEY.

THE THREE-CORNERED HAT and OTHER SPANISH
STORIES. By P. A. DE ALARCON.

THE BLACK CROSS MYSTERY. By HENRIETTE CORKRAN.

THE GREATHOGGARTY DIAMOND. By W. M. THACKERAY.

THE STEEL NECKLACE. By F. Du BOISGOBEY.

CAPTAIN SPITFIRE and THE UNLUCKY TREASURE

By P. A. DE ALARCON.

A SHABBY GENTEEL STORY. By W. M. THACKERAY.

YOUNG WIDOWS. By E. C. GRENVILLE MURRAY.

THE FIDDLER AMONG THE BANDITS.

THE DETECTIVE'S EYE. By F. Du BOISGOBEY.

ON H. B. M.'S SERVICE. By E. C. GRENVILLE MURRAY.

&c., &c., &c.

TO BE HAD OF ALL BOOKSELLERS AND AT ALL RAILWAY BOOKSTALLS.

*VIZETELLY'S SIXPENNY SERIES OF AMUSING AND
ENTERTAINING BOOKS.*

X.

THE
DETECTIVE'S EYE.

By FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

LONDON:
VIZETELLY & Co., 42 CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1886.

Perth:

S. COWAN AND CO., STRATHMORE PRINTING WORKS.

THE DETECTIVE'S EYE.

I.

THERE was a subscription ball that night at the Hôtel Continental in Paris—a ball for the furtherance of some benevolent enterprise. The rooms were thronged with representatives of many varied circles of society, but what is called the financial world predominated. While the dancers revolved to the sounds of a brilliant waltz, two young fellows, who were employed by a well-known stock-broker, and who stood in a corner between the two ball-rooms, surveyed the scene and commented on the looks of the women present. “And so, Julien,” suddenly exclaimed one of them, “you suggest that we ought to sup with Lucy Travers, the actress, and that would-be prima donna, the Baroness de Lugos?”

“Why, yes, Edmond,” answered the other; “still, if you don’t care to do so, slip away, and I will compete with the women. I told Lucy that you were quite capable of refusing, and as the baroness doesn’t know you as yet, she can easily be consoled for your absence.”

“Well, as I don’t mind amusing myself to-night, I’ll go with you.”

“I am glad to hear it. Don’t be afraid of the baroness. She doesn’t want to make a conquest of you, but she likes amusement, and Lucy proposed to take her to sup to-night at a restaurant in the Champs Elysées. You know the place well; I have engaged a private room there, and ordered supper for three o’clock. The baroness dined with Lucy, and they will drive to the restaurant in a cab; but we might stroll there on foot, as it is so near by. We ought to start in twenty minutes or so. By the way, the only people there will be ourselves. I should have invited Eric if he had come to the ball, but he hasn’t turned up.”

“I left him at three this afternoon, and he told me he intended taking his sister to the theatre this evening.”

“Ah! Well, the governor sent him to the Princess Yalta’s, and I should not be surprised if that charming Muscovite detained him. She is certainly adorable with her golden hair, her sea-green eyes, and her colourless face which changes in expression every minute.”

“Do you think that Eric is her lover?”

"I am sure of it, and think, moreover, that she might have made a worse choice. He is quite as good-looking as his sister is, and I don't think you will contradict me when I affirm that Miss Laure Duroc is charming." Thereupon Julien Fresnay gave his companion, Edmond de Chemazé, a keen glance.

"Certainly not," answered Edmond, flushing. "And her brother ought not to leave her alone as he does so often. She has no one but him in the world, for they are orphans."

"He ought to find a husband for her. I know someone who would be only too glad to marry her."

"Look!" interrupted Edmond, evidently desirous of changing the subject, "I see Monsieur Piédouche over there—he is evidently trying to approach us, and if you wish to avoid him, we have barely time to get away."

"Oh! let him come. He amuses me, for he has seen a deal of the world and knows all sorts of curious stories. He could tell us any number of things about the Princess Yalta if he chose."

"Who is this Monsieur Piédouche? I only know him because he drops in almost daily at the office to give speculating orders."

"Well, he is said to have been in the diplomatic service, but I fancy he was really in the secret police, and I am inclined to believe that he still works. Indeed, that's why he interests me so much, and why I like to talk with him."

The personage in question was now near at hand. He was a good-looking man, between fifty and sixty years of age, with grey moustaches and whiskers, bright, quick eyes, and a square chin which indicated a strong will verging upon obstinacy. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said, as he extended his hand to the two friends; "I am certain that you feel as bored as I do."

"You are quite right," cried Fresnay.

"I generally am," replied Monsieur Piédouche, gaily. "To be sure, it did not require much penetration to arrive at that conclusion; but as a rule one glance at anything or anyone suffices me. I am seldom mistaken, and I flatter myself that I have proved my acumen on several important occasions. How is it, gentlemen, that you two are here alone? Where is your bosom friend, Eric Duroc?"

"Absent on business; he left the office to take three hundred thousand francs to a lady client. Having won so much at the Bourse through our firm's instrumentality, she, of course, couldn't do otherwise than ask him to dinner."

"To be sure. Duroc is a good-looking fellow at all times, and as the bearer of such a sum, he would naturally be more radiant than usual. Would it be indiscreet to ask the name of the lady client who speculates with such good luck?"

"Not at all, she is the Princess Yalta."

"What! the Princess Morphine!"

"No, the Princess Yalta, who lives in the Rue de Tilsitt."

"Well, at Moscow she is called the Princess Morphine, on

account of her partiality for that poison. I knew her long ago, when I lived in Russia, but I have lost sight of her during the last few years."

"And what was said of her in Russia?"

"Well, some people said she was mad, while others declared that she was capable of anything. It was believed that she had more than one crime on her conscience, and at all events she is certainly a most dangerous woman. I should pity the man whom she fancied."

"But she has a husband. There is a Prince Yalta."

"Yes, a savage descended from the ancient Khans of the Crimea, and whom no one ever sees, as he leads a most eccentric life. He plays chess during six hours a-day, with people to whom he pays a most extravagant price for that purpose, and the rest of the time he drinks spirits. He is fabulously rich."

"And not in the least jealous?"

"Apparently not, and yet he is subject to ferocious whims. He was obliged to leave Russia for having intentionally killed a peasant."

"Then Eric ought to be on his guard."

"Does your friend see much of the princess then?"

"Oh, I don't say that. She merely intrusts him with her various speculations," replied Julien, not caring to make Piédouche acquainted with the secrets of his friend, Eric Duroc. "I was only in jest when I said just now that he was probably dining with his fair client. The truth is that I really have no idea where he is this evening, and in proof of it Edmond and I are going to sup without him."

"Ah! you sup, you two. Happy age!"

"Pshaw! you are young enough to do the same. Will you join us? I will introduce you to an Hungarian woman, the so-called Baroness de Lugos."

"Ah! I have heard her mentioned at my club; I hear she is remarkably pretty, and I shall be glad to see her."

"Then, pray, come with us. Lucy Travers and she are to meet us at a restaurant in the Champs Elysées. It is a glorious night, and you are not afraid of a little walk."

"Not at all; I feel in need of fresh air and a cigar. I have some excellent ones to offer you."

"Let us be off then!" said Fresnay; "I think we have stayed here quite long enough."

Edmond made no objection. He did not care for the society of Monsieur Piédouche, but he fancied that the presence of a man of his years would give an air of respectability to this supper party, which had few temptations for him. He had almost renounced his whilom gay life, and if he had not done so altogether, it was because he did not wish his friends to know that he was seriously attached to a virtuous young girl, without being sure that she returned his affection. Edmond knew all about Eric Duroc's intrigue with the Muscovite princess, and he was alarmed by what Piédouche had just said concerning her. As he wished to derive still further in-

formation from the ex-diplomatist, he determined to put up with his company, and on the strength of what Monsieur Piédouche said, he resolved that he would speak to Eric, and implore him to break off a connection which could only end in disaster.

Five minutes later the trio were walking towards the Champs Elysées. It was a clear starlight night, a few vehicles rumbled along, but not another pedestrian was in sight. Monsieur Piédouche seemed to be in the best of humours. He lighted his cigar, whistled a bar of the waltz they had just heard, and even attempted a step or two of it. "Just think!" he exclaimed, "some of these simpletons won't go off till the sun rises. They are willing to give a louis for the benefit of the poor, but they are bent on getting all they can for their money. Dancing philanthropy is a funny sort of thing after all!"

"Not so funny," answered Julien, "I rather liked it; a ball brings together so many pretty women, besides, you yourself can't be indifferent to their charms, as you came to the ball this evening."

"Oh! I go everywhere, you know—even to the Bourse—"

"And speculate very successfully. You have a large sum to your credit at our employers?"

"Oh! I have no reason to complain. The world hasn't used me badly."

"I am quite sure that the baroness will be delighted to see you. She likes men of position, and will be charmed to sup with a retired diplomatist—you were a diplomatist formerly, I believe?"

"Yes; and am so still, to a certain extent. I am still often offered delicate missions, and accept them if I find them sufficiently interesting, for, thank heaven, I have an independent fortune, and am not obliged to work unless I choose to. However, I enjoy elucidating a mystery. I was born an acute observer, and I don't like to let my capabilities rust; so, when I have no official work on hand, I utilize them for my own pleasures. I observe the people I meet, even those I don't know, and study their characters, merely to keep my hand in, to use a common expression. I can't pass a man in the street without trying to guess who he is, and I can't refrain even from studying my acquaintances."

"Then," said Fresnay, laughing, "you have studied me, as I have often had the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, would you kindly tell me what I am, and what I shall become? I haven't the smallest idea on the matter myself."

"You are a gay philosopher, and with your practical mind you will end by making a fortune."

"Thanks. I accept the horoscope, as it is precisely what I desire. But what about my friend Edmond?"

"Excuse me," interposed Edmond, "you are abusing Monsieur Piédouche's kindness."

"Not in the least," answered the ex-diplomatist cordially. "I have not had the pleasure, sir, of often seeing you, but I am inclined

to believe that you are sentimental and melancholy, and often grow exalted. I predict that you will some day give up financial business, and make a love match."

"Wonderful!" cried Julien; "our friend Edmond de Chemazé is out of place in his present employment, and pines for a country life with a charming wife. He will end by being a good husband, a good father, and the mayor of his town. But what of Eric Duroc, Mr. Sorcerer? How will he end?"

"Badly, if he is caught in the nets of the Princess Morphine," answered Piédouche, without the slightest hesitation. "I trust, however, that he will escape from her toils. I do not know him very well, but I am inclined to believe that he has strength enough to shake himself free."

"But what could happen to him if he did not?" asked Edmond, timidly.

"Why, she would delight in driving him mad, and after she had broken his heart she would cast him aside like a squeezed lemon. She never really loved a human being, though she has had innumerable whims."

"Then she is a monster, not a woman."

"No, she is simply bored, and eager for new sensations—indeed she would blow up Paris if it would give her an hour's amusement. I hope the day will come when she will fall in love with some man who will beat her well—that would only be justice. In the meantime, Monsieur Duroc ought to avoid her."

The trio had now crossed the Place de la Concorde and had passed the entrance of the Avenue des Champs Elysées. Some vehicles stood near the club houses in the Rue Royale and the Avenue Gabrielle; but otherwise the vast open space was deserted, and one only heard the confused murmur of the sleeping city. The Cours la Reine and the quay bordering the Seine are never frequented at this hour of the night. On the outskirts of the Champs Elysées, however, the establishment where Julien had ordered supper was illuminated from top to bottom, in the hope of attracting people coming from the ball. The blaze of light guided the friends onward, and they were just skirting the grove-like avenue of the Cours la Reine, when Monsieur Piédouche suddenly stopped short, and laying his hand on Julien's arm, whispered: "Do you see that man carrying a sack and trying to hide there behind the trees?"

"Yes. He wears a broad-brimmed hat like Auvergnats wear, so I suppose he is some charcoal dealer on his way to a customer's."

"Serve a customer at three o'clock in the morning! What are you thinking of?"

"Well, of course it is hardly the hour for cooks to provide themselves with fuel. But what of it?"

"Well, this is an opportunity that I cannot neglect to prove to you that I haven't overrated the sagacity I spoke to you about."

"Prove it then, my dear sir. I don't in the least understand what you are driving at; but I ask no better than to learn."

"Then I bet you five louis that this man is a thief, and that the sack he carries is full of stolen goods!"

"Which he means to throw into the river, for he is going straight towards the water?"

"That is just what I mean to ascertain. Will you come with me? I'll question him."

"And if he refuses to answer you?"

"We will collar him and make him open his sack."

"But we shall be taken to the station-house. The poor devil will call for help, and the police will arrest us for attacking him. Many thanks, I much prefer to sup with the baroness."

"I have no objection to the interference of the police. I am certain that this fellow is a thief—if no worse. But you are at liberty to leave me to act alone. I shall try it at all events. He who loves me will follow me," concluded Piédouche, darting towards the avenue.

"This is sheer folly," murmured Julien, "but it sha'n't be said that we desert you. Will you come, Edmond?"

Edmond followed, shrugging his shoulders. He quite agreed with Julien; but he was not sorry to see what Monsieur Piédouche would do under these unexpected circumstances. The man was striding towards the quay, although bowed down by the weight of his burden. He did not seem to have discovered that he was being followed, for he did not turn to look behind him. He stopped for a moment, however, when he reached the sidewalk, as if to ascertain whether anyone was in sight, and then, perceiving no one, he walked on beside the parapet of the quay towards the bridge of the Invalides. "Let us keep him in sight, but under the trees," said Piédouche, in a low voice.

"Then you don't mean to question him?" asked Julien, ironically.

"Not just yet. Don't you see that he is looking for some steps to descend to the banks of the Seine?"

"He is taking his sack to some boat near by. He must be a bargeman."

"Bargemen don't work at night. However, I shall wait until he descends the steps, and as soon as he goes down I shall go after him. He can't move very fast, his sack is evidently too heavy. We shall catch him before he has gone far. I say 'we,' because you seem willing to assist me; but if you are afraid of this fellow you can remain on the quay; I can manage perfectly well without you."

"Afraid! We will go with you to the end; and all the more willingly as I begin to feel interested in the affair."

Edmond said nothing, but he fully agreed with his friend. The man had now reached some steps leading to the embankment below, and began to descend them. "Come on!" cried Piédouche, starting into a run, and fired by his example, and stimulated by curiosity, the two friends did the same. They saw the fellow slowly

going down the steps, and by the light of a gas-burner which fell full upon him they perceived that he was really like a charcoal-vendor ; he wore a brown velveteen coat, bottle-green trousers, a black hat with a broad brim, and heavy nailed shoes. His figure, however, was not that of an Auvergnat. He was tall, but his shoulders were not broad, and he was evidently oppressed by the burden he bore. Where was he going ? There was no barge, no pile of goods near by. Julien saw that at once, and he began to believe that Piédouche was in the right.

The man did not even yet appear to suspect that he was being followed ; and it seemed easy to capture him ; but Julien Fresnay unfortunately was not endowed with much patience, and he suddenly called out, "Hallo, my friend, wait a bit ! I should like to buy a bushel of your charcoal."

On hearing this the man turned and showed a grimy face, then seeing Piédouche, he hastily dropped his sack and darted along the embankment towards the bridge of the Invalides.

"Ah ! you ought not to have called out," said Piédouche, impatiently, to Julien. "The scoundrel will escape unless you help me to overtake him. Your legs are better than mine !"

"All right. The exercise will do us no harm, and the adventure is becoming amusing. Come on, Edmond," said Julien.

Edmond did not require to be urged. His curiosity also was aroused, and he began to believe that Piédouche had been correct in his suppositions. They ran on, all three towards the bridge, where a steep ascent led to the quay above. The fugitive did not turn in that direction, however, but darted under the first arch of the bridge, and momentarily disappeared from the eyes of his pursuers. However, he unluckily stumbled against a stone and suddenly fell to the ground. "We have him now !" said Julien, putting on a spurt, and, indeed, it seemed that the man would not escape. "Surrender, scoundrel !" cried Julien ; but at the very moment when he extended his arms, the stranger sprang to his feet, and threw himself over the river bank, diving in a manner that would have done credit to a swimming master.

Julien uttered an energetic oath, and if Edmond had not held him back he might also have sprung into the Seine to continue the pursuit. But he presently began to realize that all hope was not lost, that the man must soon come to the surface, and then make for the shore, where he would infallibly be captured. It was only necessary to keep a sharp watch on the water, and not lose sight of the fellow when he reappeared. This was also the opinion of Monsieur Piédouche, who, having overtaken the friends, had heard the noise made by the plunge, and instantly grasped the situation. "Keep your eyes open, gentlemen," he gasped, for he was almost breathless. "You, Monsieur de Chemazé, must remain here in case the rascal takes it into his head to return up-stream to throw us off the scent. You, Fresnay, run beyond the bridge, in case he goes down the stream ; and should he cross it I'll receive him on the

opposite bank. We must each of us signal to the others if we see anything of our man."

Julien obeyed Piédouche's order, and waited, gazing at the water, greatly surprised that nothing had yet been seen of the diver. Piédouche, under the arch, assured himself that the man was not clinging to one of the rings used for mooring boats. The river was greatly swollen by recent rain, and the diplomatist was able, in spite of the darkness, to make certain that the man had not resorted to this manœuvre. Several minutes elapsed, all three watching, and finally Julien abandoned his post, and approached the others, saying: "He must be drowned. The man-fish performing at the Circus couldn't remain as long as this under water!"

"I really begin to believe that he is done for," answered Piédouche.

"Then it is useless for us to stay here. The charcoal-dealer has escaped us, but we still have his sack. Let us go and see if it really contains charcoal."

"Charcoal," said Monsieur Piédouche. "Well, I'm certain that it contains something of far more consequence. If this scamp drowned himself, it was because he preferred to end his days in that way rather than in a prison or on the scaffold."

"You evidently think him to be a thief and a murderer," said Julien, with a laugh.

"And I intend to show you this time that I am not mistaken," rejoined Piédouche. "The sack is not far off, and there is nothing more for us to do here. Come on, gentlemen!"

Julien asked nothing better, and Edmond was now anxious to have done with the affair. They, thereupon, walked back in silence to the spot where the man had dropped the sack, near the steps. There was no one in sight, and the mysterious burden lay just as it had fallen. "I was afraid that the police might have been here and taken possession of our treasure during our absence," said Fresnay. "But I see that my fears were groundless. Upon my word, criminals have it much their own way in this part of the city!"

"There is a police station not far off," muttered Piédouche.

"But never a policeman at hand, when he's needed! However, now let us see whether I have won or lost my bet. That point ascertained, I shall be off—"

"You are free to go at once, my dear fellow, and Monsieur de Chemazé, too, but I shall open the sack, and examine its contents before going to supper."

"Well, we will all go together, but let us be quick about the business."

"Just as you please," answered Piédouche. "In cases like this I'm not afraid of using my hands, and I shall know what to do if my previsions are realized, whereas you might be greatly embarrassed."

"I admit that habit is everything," Julien replied. "I have

read many vivid descriptions of crimes, but I never chanced to witness one, and I shouldn't care to figure as a witness in some celebrated trial."

"Then you had better be off, for this will prove one. I will do my best to avoid your being mixed up in it, but I can of course make no promises. You may have been seen with me, and in that case I should have to give full explanations."

"Then I think we had best remain. If we *are* to be involved in some affair, it is as well we should see all we can, and I am dying of curiosity to know what is in this sack," concluded Fresnay, pushing it with his foot as he spoke.

"Do you still think it contains charcoal?" asked Piédouche, looking at him fixedly.

"No," muttered the young man; "the surface of the sack wouldn't be smooth like that. There's some dirty linen inside perhaps. You will find that this seemingly terrible affair is merely the theft of some bed-clothes."

"Men don't drown themselves for a theft, nor throw what they've stolen into the river."

"Well, let us have done with it. See how pale poor Edmond is."

Meanwhile the retired diplomatist had knelt down, and without showing the least repugnance he had begun to open the sack which was secured with a stout strap passed through several brass rings and fastened by a steel buckle. "A nice piece of work," muttered Monsieur Piédouche; "one would think this was a letter-bag. It will be very easy to discover where this sack was manufactured. That fellow didn't imagine he would be surprised on his way to the water. A professional murderer wouldn't have been guilty of such an oversight."

"Why do you talk like that?" asked Julien, in an agitated voice; "there isn't as yet the slightest proof of any murder."

"What do you say?" answered Piédouche, as he finally unbuckled the strap. "And what did I tell you?" he continued, turning back the open end of the sack.

Julien, who had leaned forward in eager curiosity, promptly straightened himself up again, and his friend Chemazé recoiled in horror. The pale moonlight gleamed on two tiny bare feet which looked like white marble as they rested on the dark grey sackcloth. "It is a woman's corpse," said Piédouche, quietly. "I suspected as much. The rascal we were in pursuit of wasn't strong enough to carry a man. But look, the legs are cased with lead. Do you remember the crime at Le Pecq, gentlemen? If our man had studied that case more attentively he would have known that it required a greater weight than this to keep a corpse at the bottom of the water."

"Oh! this is no time for talking," exclaimed Julien. "We must call for the police, or run to some station-house. At all events, we can't stand here doing nothing."

"Of course not, but first of all let me uncover the body. Come, you are men, and surely you can bear the sight, hideous as it may prove. It won't require a minute. I will take hold of the other end of the sack and draw it off. When we have seen the poor creature's face there will be no need to stay here longer, but it is as well that we should see it while we are here."

"Why, pray? Do you imagine we could recognize her?"

"Who knows? She isn't a woman of the lower orders; her feet are as well cared for as if she were a duchess, and you young fellows know everybody in society—at least by sight."

Piédouche had already changed his position, and he now drew the sack off the body as calmly as if he were removing an umbrella case. Edmond and Julien, almost paralyzed with horror, were yet so fascinated by the horrible sight that they could not avert their gaze. It was a strange spectacle, these three men in evening dress and putty-coloured overcoats bending over this bare corpse!

"Ah!" resumed the retired diplomatist, "the body has been sewn in oil-cloth from the knees up. Fortunately, I have a pocket-scissors about me. I think the arms must be cased in lead like the legs, for the weight prevents the oil-cloth coming off. Ah! I have it now. Here are the shoulders; ah! they are bare, and, good gracious! we shall never see the woman's face, her head has gone! The folks who committed this crime were smarter than I imagined. No one can ever recognize this woman now."

"How horrible!" muttered Julien.

Edmond nearly fainted, and if his friend had not caught hold of him he would have fallen. Piédouche was right. The head had gone, and no blood oozed from this decapitated body. "The cut couldn't have been cleaner if it had been done by the guillotine," muttered Piédouche, after carefully examining the neck. And then, rising from his knees, he continued, in an imperative tone, "Gentlemen, we are in the presence of a crime such as has been rarely witnessed, and which will make a great sensation. You do not wish to be mixed up in the affair? Very good; then leave me here, and send me the first two policemen you meet. Tell them you heard cries for assistance from the river bank. They won't refuse to come. I will explain the matter to them, and shall not mention your names."

"All right," answered Julien; "we will go at once."

"I shall not mention your names, you understand, unless I am compelled to do so by unexpected circumstances; but I have one condition to make, that you shall give me your word to be equally reticent. If you amuse yourselves by telling this story to your friends and acquaintances, I shall know of it, and shall then be compelled to mention you as witnesses."

"We will be most discreet, I assure you; though I must confess that I do not see how you can manage without us."

"That is my affair. But make haste and do what I said, for I don't care to remain here alone very long."

The friends did not wait to hear any more ; they ascended to the quay, and they speedily espied two policemen coming towards them with a slow, dignified gait. Julien took the speaking on himself and told the policemen that he had just heard some cries for help from the river-bank, that he had not cared to go down to see what the trouble was, but that he thought the matter ought to be seen to.

The policemen asked no questions, but at once went in the direction pointed out to them.

"Now," said Julien, "I shall let Piédouche do as he likes. I wash my hands of this horrible affair. Let us go to supper."

"Supper !" cried Edmond. "Can you think of supper after what we have seen ?"

"I admit that my appetite isn't what I should like, but really we can't leave our guests waiting for us until dawn."

"Well, I am going to bed, and to sleep, if I can."

"At least come with me as far as the restaurant, for I want to talk to you a little. I now feel certain that Piédouche has never been any more of a diplomatist than myself—in fact, that he is simply a detective."

"I agree with you, and we had better see as little of him as possible."

"Quite so. He comes every day to the Bourse and gives me directions concerning his speculations, but I intend to be very cautious in my dealings with him. What a stir this affair will make. Fortunately, we sha'n't get into any trouble. Let Piédouche manage it all ; he is certainly very clever ; as shrewd as he thinks himself—That reminds me, I owe him five louis, he has fairly won the bet. Rouse yourself, my dear fellow, shake off this depression and come to supper with us. Here we are at the restaurant. Come in and help me to apologise for our lack of punctuality."

Edmond would probably have refused, but before he could speak Julien exclaimed: "Ah ! here comes Eric ! What luck !"

Eric Duroc was indeed crossing the road ; he had not yet perceived his friends, but was approaching rapidly, and so absorbed in thought that he nearly ran into Julien's arms before he saw him.

"What ! Are you here ?" he exclaimed, as he disengaged himself. "And Edmond, too. I did not expect to see you here."

"Well, we have just come from the charity ball, at the Continental, where you ought to have been, and we are now greatly in need of supper."

"Like myself."

"I dare say. But where have you been ? You look frightfully pale and worried."

"I assure you—"

"Never mind, my dear fellow, you are not compelled to tell us why you are tired. I won't pry into your secrets. I only ask you to sup with us. Chance has brought us together, so let us profit by it."

"Willingly ; but I warn you that I shall go off after swallowing a dozen oysters and a slice of paté."

"Just as you please. The women won't detain you by force."

"The women ! You two are not alone then ?" and Eric turned toward Edmond, who hastily replied, "The fact is, Julien invited Lucy Travers the actress and that Baroness de Lugos who wants to come out as a singer, without informing me ; but I care nothing at all about them ; and if you prefer it, my dear Eric, I will sup with you in the main room of the restaurant."

"Upon my word that's cool !" cried Julien, "and all because you are afraid that Eric will tell tales out of school ! What a simpleton you are. Do you suppose that Eric chatters to his sister like that ? No, he won't tell her that he met us here any more than he has told us whence he comes with this Hamlet-like look to-night. Come upstairs, I must eat and drink, or I shall die."

Edmond and Eric thereupon followed him. The latter, in spite of what he had said, was evidently preoccupied and out of spirits. This was certainly very unfortunate for Julien's feminine guests, for Eric was by nature calculated to make an impression on their hearts. He was tall, well built and as swarthy as an Arab, with curly black hair, passionate eyes, full red lips and dazzling teeth. He was indeed of the Creole type, though born in Paris, and an absolute contrast to his two friends. Edmond was fair, with delicate features, and a distinguished air, while Julien, on his side, was conspicuous for his intelligent look, and it was evident that he would be highly successful in business as Piédouche had predicted. The private room he had engaged was on the first floor, and he entered it with an air of bravado, for he expected to be greeted with reproaches, but he found the baroness and Lucy Travers already partaking of the supper which he had ordered in the morning. "It seems that you can amuse yourselves without us," he said, with a sigh of relief. "I needn't, therefore, make the apologies I prepared. But I must introduce these gentlemen. Baroness, this is Monsieur Edmond de Chemazé, who has the greatest possible sympathy for Hungary and fair Hungarians. Monsieur Eric Duroc, a born boulevardier and financier, speculator in ordinary to several princesses."

The last words brought a frown to Eric's brow. "Lucy," continued Julien, "I present no one to *you* because you know everybody already. And now, gentlemen, take your seats, eat, drink and be merry ; but for Heaven's sake, pass me that bottle of Moët's Brut Impérial. Such capital wine as that is just the thing to raise my spirits to a level with those of the ladies."

"He wants to drink to forget that business," thought Edmond, who could think of nothing but the frightful sight on the bank of the Seine. He took his seat silently at the end of the table, declared he was neither hungry nor thirsty, and having obtained permission to light a cigarette, he looked at Eric, whose singular manner occasioned him great uneasiness.

A waiter had served both Duroc and Julien, and as soon as he had

retired, Lucy Travers exclaimed : "You have not yet told us why you are so late."

"It was not our fault," answered Fresnay, between two mouthfuls ; "we were detained by a gentleman who wished to join our party."

"And why did you not bring him? Who was he?"

"A certain Monsieur Piédouche, a retired diplomatist, and a customer of the firm with which I am connected. I should have been glad to present him to you, and we came away from the ball together, but the fact is, we lost him on the way."

"Oh! never mind, I have no particular fancy for him. I believe he is a detective."

"Oh! no. I don't think that."

"Wasn't he in Austria last year?" asked the baroness.

"Perhaps. He is always travelling. What do they say of him in Vienna?"

"That he was the agent of a great Parisian banker who had sent him in search of a runaway cashier."

"You hear that!" cried Lucy. "The fellow is simply a police spy, and we have no reason to regret his absence."

Julien was quite of the same opinion, but he did not press the point. He had merely spoken of Piédouche to ascertain if his guests had ever heard of any such person and what they thought of him.

"As for myself," resumed the baroness, "I regret that he did not come. As he is in the police force, I should have asked his opinion about something we saw on our way here."

"What! have you also seen strange things to-night?" cried Julien, heedlessly.

"A most singular thing, I assure you," said Lucy. "When it was time to come here I sent my maid to order a cab, as I didn't like to take my horses out again so late, and at precisely a quarter to three we started off, driving down the Champs Elysées. Well, just as our vehicle was turning the corner of the Palais de l'Industrie, we nearly came into collision with a carriage standing close to the wall, so much in the shadow that I couldn't blame our driver for not seeing it. But I was frightened out of my wits, and when I put my head out of the window, I discovered that this mysterious equipage was a private one—a brougham with a pair of superb horses. The singular part of it all was that the carriage door was open and a man dressed like a porter was taking a huge sack out of it."

Julien, who so far had been listening rather carelessly, now became extremely attentive, and Edmond did not attempt to conceal his excitement. Eric, however, did not appear to have heard a syllable, nor did he notice the glances which the fair Hungarian was lavishing upon him. In fact he seemed pre-occupied. "Well? And what then?" asked Fresnay, with an air of indifference.

"Well, then the man shut the carriage door, and taking the sack on his shoulders, went off towards the Cours la Reine, while

the brougham was driven back to the Champs Elysées. The coachman lashed his horses ; he was a big fellow with a huge fur collar, and the horses were dapple greys, and in ten seconds the equipage had vanished."

"And the man with the sack ?"

"Oh ! he had disappeared among the trees, and we drove on to the restaurant. Now, isn't this a curious story ?"

"I will cheerfully admit that street porters don't usually drive about in private broughams or deliver goods at three o'clock in the morning. But there may be some simple explanation of it after all. It would be interesting to know to whom the brougham belonged."

"Katinka declares that both the coachman and horses were Russian," said Lucy.

Eric, who was buried in thought, raised his head on hearing this. Russia evidently interested him.

"But how could you be sure of that, baroness ?" asked Julien. "It was dark, wasn't it ?"

"Yes," said Madame de Lugos ; "but I could see the coachman's beard and the horses. The man was a Moujik, and the horses were Orloff trotters."

"Well, if you are right, one could easily discover the owner of the brougham. Bearded coachmen and Orloff trotters cannot be very common in Paris."

"Oh !" rejoined the baroness, "the Princess Yalta has half a dozen horses of that breed in her stables, and she is often driven by a coachman in Muscovite costume—toque, caftan, boots, and beard all complete."

"But she doesn't carry charcoal about in the middle of the night, I imagine."

"Oh ! I don't say that the brougham was hers. The coachman wore a French livery which didn't in the least correspond with his beard, and the princess would not allow that. In her establishment everything is perfect, servants and horses : it is only her own conduct that isn't so."

Eric turned very pale, and abruptly asked Madame de Lugos : "What do you know of her conduct ?"

"Only what every one knows," answered the fair Hungarian, greatly offended by his manner. "Do you mean to become her sponsor and defend her reputation against attacks ? I warn you, sir, that you will have a deal to do."

Eric bit his lips to restrain the sharp words that sprung to them. Edmond, who was watching him, understood the situation, and made an attempt to change the subject, but he was not seconded by Julien, who was determined to hear something more about this mysterious brougham which was evidently connected with the crime Piédouche had discovered. Finally Eric, whose patience was exhausted, abruptly rose from the table, saying : "I've lost my appetite, Julien, and must be off to bed. Please settle the bill and let me know what I owe you."

"Do the same for me," added Edmond, rising at the same moment.

"What ! going off ? you must be mad !" cried Fresnay.

The women exchanged glances, expressive of their displeasure ; but the young fellows evidently cared very little for their looks, or for their friend Fresnay's evident annoyance, and they hastily took their leave.

"Shall we walk ?" said Eric to his companion, when they were outside.

"I was about to ask you the same question," answered Edmond.

"We are in no great hurry, and our ways lie the same direction. Shall I see you home ?"

"I shall be very glad if you will. I am out of sorts and the companionship of a friend is a blessing. I hoped that a good supper would banish my dark thoughts, but I was mistaken. I was inexpressibly bored by the hare-brained chatter of these frivolous women. That so-called baroness is particularly insupportable. The idea of her presuming to judge women of rank !"

"I did not fancy her any more than you do," said his companion. "However, Fresnay maintains that she and Lucy Travers are less dangerous companions than certain great ladies. And I fancy he is right." Eric did not reply to this evident overture, and they walked on for some minutes in silence. "I am a bad judge in such matters," resumed Edmond, at last. "As for myself, if I loved a woman I must marry her."

"You talk in a very matter-of-fact fashion."

"Precisely, and I am matter-of-fact—I hope to marry a woman I love some day, a woman who will love me. One can never be certain of that, and yet I hope that my dream will be realized."

"Ah ! mine is finished," said Eric, gloomily. "Just now, when I met you, I was asking myself if it wouldn't be best for me to throw myself into the Seine."

"What are you saying ?" cried Edmond. "Have you forgotten your sister ?"

"No ; and I shall live solely on her account. I have certainly earned enough to leave her a competence, but what would become of her alone in the world at her age—only nineteen ? Ah ! if I could only see her married to a good fellow like yourself."

Edmond caught his breath at these words, which clearly proved that Laure Duroc's brother had not read his friend's heart. If Eric had dreamed that Edmond de Chemazé was in love with his sister, he would never have spoken in this way. He was not the man to cater for a proposal. "You do me too much honour," said Edmond, in a broken voice. "I only wish that your sister was of the same opinion."

"Are you in earnest, or are you simply saying something polite ?" asked Duroc, abruptly.

"What would you think if I told you that for a whole year—in

fact, from the day I first saw your sister—I have thought only of her ? ”

“ And she—does she know it ? ”

“ I have never presumed to speak to her on the subject ; but it is quite possible that she has guessed it as Julien has, although I never mentioned the matter to him, as you may well believe.”

“ I now understand certain allusions ; and I now know why Laure so often speaks of you. I have certainly been very blind, but I now assure you, my dear Edmond, that I retract nothing of what I said.”

“ And you would not object to such a marriage ? ”

“ What right should I have to object if Laure loves you ? Isn't she free to dispose of her hand as she chooses ? Besides, I have absolute confidence in you.”

“ Need I tell you that this confidence is reciprocal ? ”

“ You have often proved it. And now, though it is a little odd to hold such a conversation in the street, I give you my word that to-morrow I will speak on the subject to my sister and give you my warmest support.” Edmond attempted to express his gratitude, but Duroc interrupted him. “ You owe me nothing,” he said. “ If you marry Laure, as I hope you will, the obligation will be on my side, as I shall then be able to leave France. Yes, I mean to go to America or to Australia, to the end of the world. I can leave Laure in your care without fear. My father was a poor man when he died, but I now possess about six hundred thousand francs. Half of this sum will be Laure's dowry and the other half will be enough for me.”

“ But why do you wish to go away, my dear fellow ? ” asked Edmond. “ What troubles you ? You have a sister who loves you, and many devoted friends. You are young, you are rich, and you owe your fortune to your own intelligence. Who is marring your life ? ”

By this time the friends had reached the Boulevard de la Madeleine, at this hour as deserted as the Champs Elysées. “ Who mars my life ? ” repeated Duroc. “ You know very well it is a woman ! You have seen that foreigner who comes to the Bourse so often and drives me away in her conspicuous equipage. Ah ! I am not only her lover—I am her slave and plaything. She has sworn to degrade and humiliate me, as well as to destroy every good impulse of my soul. She hates all who love me. She hates me myself. You will see it when I tell you the history of the last few hours. You left me at three o'clock, just before the Bourse closed.”

“ Yes, and I was glad to see that the Russian had not appeared as usual.”

“ Because we hadn't been on good terms for two days. In fact, we had had a most violent quarrel. I fancied that all was over between us, and I was fool enough to regret it. Still I determined to live only for Laure, to become her companion and protector again, and I proposed to her that we should dine together at a

restaurant, and then go to the theatre. I was to call for her at seven o'clock, and she was highly pleased at the prospect."

"But you were sent to the princess's with some money."

"Yes, she wrote expressly to say that this money was to be sent to her at six o'clock, and by no one but myself. Our chief insisted in such a way that I was obliged to go. I went to the Rue de Tilsitt flattering myself that I might be able to hand the money to the majordomo without even seeing Nadèje—that is her name, and I regret to find that it still comes naturally to my lips. I saw, however, as soon as I reached the mansion, that I was expected. The horses she alone drives were standing in the courtyard, and she herself was at the window of the drawing-room. Her valet announced me, and her face and manner evinced no anger. I gave her the money without speaking, and she tossed it into a drawer without taking the trouble to count it."

"But she gave you a receipt, I suppose?"

"A receipt lay on the table. I took it, and was going away in silence when she said to me: 'I shall dine with you to-day;' she spoke as if I were a valet. I coldly answered that it was quite impossible. She insisted in knowing why, and when she learnt that my sister was waiting for me, I read on her face that she would kill me rather than let me go away. The idea of making a poor little girl suffer pleased her greatly."

"And you yielded?" asked Edmond, sadly.

"Had you heard her voice you would have yielded too. She threw herself at my feet, and swore that she loved me and only me, and proposed that I should start for Russia with her this very night. However, all this acting was only to induce me to go and dine with her at a low eating-house—another one of her whims. At last I yielded."

"You sent a note to Mademoiselle Laure, of course?"

"No, Nadèje would not permit it. Laure, tearful and expectant, was a pleasing thought to her."

"Well—and what then?"

"Well, it is needful that you should know that at the outset of our intimacy she insisted on my hiring a house where we two could meet whenever we chose. I found such a house as she desired, a tiny one in the neighbourhood of the Champs Elysées, and we have often been there. Well, after dining at that low eating-house, where we were seen by fifty people, she drove me in her carriage to the house I have spoken of, and there left me on some pretext, saying she would return in an hour's time. Midnight came, and she was still absent. Then, in a rage with myself and with her, I determined to leave, and found a letter that had been slipped under the door. This was what she wrote—I know every word by heart: 'Poor fool! I was sure that I had only to lift my finger to bring you back to my feet. I took your measure long ago. I treated you like a lackey, and you did not strike me to the earth. If you had done so, I think I should have adored you; but you have a

chicken's heart. I leave Paris to-night for some days, and when I return I shall not condescend to recognize you. Forget that you have ever seen me. If you see fit to remember it, I have my vengeance all ready, and you will have reason to curse the day when I took a fancy for you—a passing fancy, that did not last an hour. Shed as many tears as you choose—shedding tears is your profession ; and pray heaven that I may never think of you again.' That was all. Not one word of tenderness or regret—nothing but insults and threats."

"The woman is surely mad !" cried Edmond de Chemazé.

"Mad ? No ; she may eventually become so, for she poisons herself every day with morphine ; but as yet she is sane enough. She is simply carried away by her pride and her ferocity. She only thinks of crimes. Do you know that one day she urged me to commit a forgery ? And what for ? Simply to prove that I was willing to dishonour myself for her sake. She swore that if I would do that she would love me as she had never loved before ; and I think she was sincere."

"But this is horrible ! You ought to be thankful that you are delivered from such a creature."

"After reading that atrocious letter, I only thought of killing her. I ran to her house in the Rue de Tilsitt. I hoped she was still there, and that I should see her as she went off. I had a loaded revolver on my person, and I determined to blow her brains out and then my own. The house was ablaze with light, that is, excepting the wing in which her apartments are—for the prince only sleeps during day-time ; he drinks all night with his familiars—and his servants never enter the part of the mansion inhabited by the princess and her retainers. On the first floor of the right wing, which she inhabits, a single light was burning faintly. The door of the private staircase leading to her rooms was locked, but I hoped it would soon open. You see I had lost all reasoning powers. How long I remained in front of this door, I don't know. Finally, I saw a carriage arrive. It was the one in which we had gone to the eating-house ; but it was now driven by a Russian groom, who did not know one word of French. I could not question him, of course. The horse was covered with foam, and had evidently gone a long distance. I at once realised that she had carried out her design and left Paris."

"What, alone ? Without any of her people, and without informing the prince ? It's incredible !"

"You don't know her ; she has done the same thing repeatedly ; she goes to Russia, to Nice, to Italy, or to a chateau she owns in the depths of Brittany ; she goes whenever she takes it into her head to go and returns when she pleases. Her husband never concerns himself about her absence. But to tell the rest of my story, the groom whistled, the gate was opened, and in another moment the light that I had noticed on the first floor was extinguished. The Cossack maid, who serves the princess, had probably

been waiting for the return of the carriage in case her mistress might change her mind and come back ; and, that not being the case, she had at last retired to rest. It was clear that my vengeance had escaped me."

"You must now forget this woman?"

"I shall try to do so, and perhaps I may succeed. I had courage enough to remain alive, instead of killing myself as I was tempted to do ; and I was fortunate enough to meet you just as I was going into that restaurant, where I should probably have drunk enough to stupefy me ; and then I don't know what I might not have done later on. But a word about yourself, Edmond. To-morrow I will question Laure, and if, as I wish and hope, she is favourably inclined, the marriage may take place very soon. I am anxious to feel that her happiness is assured."

Edmond replied as men usually do under such circumstances, but to tell the truth, his friend's narrative had greatly disturbed him.

The two young fellows had now reached the corner of the Cité d'Antin where Eric and his sister occupied a pretty apartment on the first floor of a quiet house. Day was breaking, but all was still quiet in this secluded corner of Paris. "It is very strange," suddenly said Eric, "but there is some one on the balcony—a woman!"

"And you don't recognize her?" asked Edmond, softly.

"Laure! Yes, to be sure ; she has spent the whole night waiting for me. Ah! I deserve all the sorrows which may befall me."

A joyous exclamation resounded. His sister had seen him, and was greeting him with gesture and voice. The balcony was not ten feet above the pavement. The young girl leant over the railing, and, though tears were still in her eyes, she tried to smile. Eric, carried away as it were by the force of circumstances, now did a most extraordinary thing. "Forgive me!" he cried to Laure ; "I have brought you a husband. Edmond de Chemazé is in love with you, and has asked me to allow him to tell you so."

It was a strange thing to do, certainly ; but there was no one to hear these words, save the young lovers themselves, and the twittering birds roused by the dawn. Laure coloured, Edmond turned pale, and Eric, as he shook hands with him, exclaimed, "Till to-morrow, my dear brother!"

II.

THREE days had elapsed. Monsieur Piédouche had just breakfasted, and was smoking an excellent cigar in his private room on the fourth floor of a stylish house in the Rue de Rivoli. His valet, after serving coffee and various liqueurs on a small lacquered table, had ushered in a gentleman wearing a parti-coloured rosette in his button-hole ; and this gentleman and Monsieur Piédouche were exchanging views on a subject of importance. "Then you persist in believing," said the visitor, "that the customary exhibition of the body will do no good. It has been embalmed, you know, so that it is not too late."

"My dear director," answered Piédouche, "the Morgue has its utility, but it would be difficult to recognize a headless body. There is no conspicuous mark on it, and even if a man did recognize it, he wouldn't acknowledge so, for obvious reasons."

"And yet, it seems to me that our first step should be to establish the identity of the victim."

"Yes, but the persons who perpetrated this crime have undoubtedly burned the head ; or buried it in some place where it will not readily be found. Ah ! if I only solve this mystery, it will be the crowning triumph of my career."

"We expect you to do so, and I am authorised to promise you a handsome honorarium from the secret service funds. At present we merely wish you to indicate your views and keep us in a measure informed as to your movements. You know what has already been done. We yielded to your advice, and have kept the affair as quiet as possible. We had a deal of trouble with the newspaper reporters ; but we have given them to understand that the affair was a dismal farce, perpetrated by some young medical students. As there has been no body at the Morgue, the public will naturally conclude that there has been no crime, and the whole story will soon be forgotten. That is, so it seems to me, the weak point in your combination, my dear Piédouche. You were not alone when you saw the man with the sack, and the two young fellows with you will constantly chatter."

"Indeed, they won't. They wouldn't care to be mixed up in an affair of this kind on any consideration. They don't even wish to appear as witnesses. I saw them both yesterday and sounded them on the point. After they left me that night, they went to sup with

two women, but made no allusion to what they had seen. I managed to meet one of the women the next day, a Hungarian whom I knew in Vienna. I questioned her adroitly, and found that she knew nothing; though in describing the supper to me, she gave me some useful information. You have no idea how much information I have picked up in the last forty-eight hours."

"Pray communicate it to me, so that I may lay it before our chief. Your plan, whatever it may be, meets in advance with approval; but at headquarters they wish to know it so that our movements may not clash with yours; for of course other men, subordinates, must be put on the case."

Piédouche nodded, with a contemplative air, and then began rather pompously—vanity was his pet sin—"You do me great honour in placing such confidence in me, and I hope to prove to you that this confidence is not misplaced. I am endowed, as you are aware, with peculiar keenness of vision. It is a natural gift, and enables me to distinguish one point in a mysterious affair, which point itself is so obscure that it has escaped every one else. Upon this point I build my first hypothesis, which I fortify in every imaginable way, and when I have collected facts enough, I proceed from deduction to deduction to a mathematical certainty."

"I understand your theory, and I shall understand it still better when you have supported it by an example drawn from the subject which now occupies us."

"Precisely. You will remember that the physician who made the post-mortem examination of this body reported the existence of certain peculiar scars or prickings?"

"Yes, I remember. He even hinted that the woman had been killed by a needle dipped in prussic acid; for the body bore no wounds nor the least sign of violence, so that the poor creature must have been stunned by a blow on the head. However, after due examination, the doctor reported that these tiny scars had been made with a little instrument often employed—"

"To make subcutaneous injections of morphine in cases when persons are suffering from nervous disorders. Well, that is the very point. As you are aware, it has become greatly the fashion among women to inject morphine into their own bodies, simply to procure agreeable sensations. It is a mania, like the Chinese mania for opium; and when I was in Moscow I knew a Russian lady of high rank, who was so devoted to the use of this poison, that she was known as the Princess Morphine."

"But we are not in Moscow."

"Well, this princess has been living in Paris for a year. She is the wife of Prince Yalta, who resides in the finest mansion in the Rue de Tilsitt."

"And you believe that some one has cut off her head? No, no, that is too improbable."

"I will prove to you that my idea is not so wild. You will remember that the decapitated body was well shaped and the skin

remarkably soft. That the feet and hands were not only of admirable proportions, but most exquisitely cared for, to that degree indeed, that the nails were tinted with henna, a pinkish paste in much esteem in the harems of the East."

"But you surely found your opinion on more serious reasons than these? Besides, your princess does not lead a secluded life as a rule, and we must first ascertain if she has disappeared."

"That is precisely what I am trying to do. No one has seen her since last Saturday. You may say that she is ill, but I have proof to the contrary. On Saturday she went to dine with her lover at an eating-house at Asnières. She went there in an open carriage, and returned in the same."

"She has not much fear of her husband, then?"

"Oh! He leaves her quite free. She receives whom she chooses, and goes where she likes. On Saturday evening after dinner she drove her lover to a house which he has rented for some little time. They were seen by people who were passing. This is all I have succeeded in ascertaining as yet, but I feel that my time has not been wasted."

"Your agents are more efficacious than mine."

"Oh! I only employ my valet; but I have trained him thoroughly, and when I let him loose on a scent, I am sure that he will follow it properly. Thus I have told him to chat with the princess's servants and study the house where she and her lover met. But the rest of the work is for me. I mean to introduce myself to Prince Yalta—I have a way of reaching him—and then I shall find out if the princess did really disappear on Saturday evening."

"If she did, the prince would have sent word to the police."

"You don't know him. He never disturbs himself about her; but when I once get into that house I shall make the acquaintance of the Cossack girl who is the princess's favourite maid. I must, however, first visit the house where the princess and her lover met. I have a key to it. My valet has many small but useful talents. He can take the impression of a lock, and if necessary even make a key. I am therefore able to get into the dwelling whenever I choose, and that is an important matter, for the princess went there that night; and since then there has been, so far as I have been able to discover, no trace of her."

"Then, in your opinion, who killed her?"

"Her lover—a young fellow named Eric Duroc who works for a stockbroker and makes a deal of money. I have long known him, for I have constant business with his employer."

"And how did this fellow make the acquaintance of the princess?"

"Oh, she speculates, and saw this young man in the office. As he is wonderfully good-looking, she amused herself with him, and I don't doubt but what he met her more than half way, for it was a very good thing for him. It flattered his vanity, in the first place,

and then she shared in his ventures, assumed their risk, and so in six months' time he has reaped a fine harvest."

"Then why should he kill her? It is a case of the goose with the golden eggs."

"I first thought that he killed her in order to obtain three hundred thousand francs which he was sent to take her that same Saturday evening, but I changed this opinion, because I have ascertained that he brought back the receipt for this money. Of course, this receipt might be forged, but the young fellow's antecedents being good, I am inclined to believe that he killed her from jealousy. He was passionately attached to her, and she probably treated him as she has treated many other men—she likes to exasperate her lovers. He probably found out that she was deceiving him, and killed her in a fit of rage, after a violent quarrel?"

"You are perhaps right, but how do you explain what followed? Why was the head cut off? And the sheets of lead and the sack must have been in readiness; these things make it look as if the crime were the work of a man who had done something of the kind before."

"No, these things prove rather that it is what we call the work of an amateur. Only honest men invent these unusual means. A common criminal would have left the body, and not have cared whether it was recognized or not."

"But Duroc must have had an accomplice; for it wasn't he who carried the sack, and who drowned himself to escape you."

"No, he was at the Bourse yesterday. But in the first place, I am by no means certain that the man with the sack *was* drowned. I was so taken by surprise when the fellow jumped into the river that I behaved, I must admit, like a school-boy. I waited in the most stupid way for him to appear again, forgetting that near the Pont des Invalides there is a sewer-opening by which he could make his escape as easily as possible. A good swimmer would find no difficulty in getting that far, and once there, emerging from the water under the vault, he could have waited till we went off. And the more I think of it, the more I am convinced that this is precisely what the rascal did. A man doesn't die while there is still a chance to save himself. Besides, I do not believe that this man was the princess's lover: in fact, I have very good reasons for thinking the contrary. The Hungarian woman, who was present at the supper given by my companions on the night of the murder, told me that while she and another woman were driving to the restaurant in a cab, they saw a man, carrying a large sack, alight from a brougham at the corner of the Palais de l'Industrie. The brougham drove up the Champs Elysées again, while the man with the sack went towards the Cours la Reine; he was evidently the same fellow whom we followed a few minutes later. Now this Hungarian woman—she calls herself a baroness—insists that the horses and the coachman of the brougham were Russian. The horses were Orloff trotters and the coachman wore a full beard like

all Moujiks. Now I have ascertained that when the princess and her lover reached the house where they were in the habit of meeting, she sent her carriage, an open one, away, and gave her footman orders to return and fetch her between one and two A.M. with a brougham. The order was obeyed. The usual coachman drove the brougham, a footman sat on the box beside him, and at half-past one the brougham stood in the Avenue Montaigne near the house where the princess met her lover."

"All this seems reasonable enough, but I don't see—"

"Wait a bit; you must know that the princess is execrated by her people. She has them flogged as in the old Russian serf days. This is a condition which she imposes on all who enter her service, and they accept it, for she gives very liberal wages; but the servants all hate her, the present footman and coachman especially. I am sure of all that. They would long since have denounced her to the prince, had they not known that he tolerated her conduct. There is only her maid who is really devoted to her. And as this woman is quite as bad as her mistress, the other servants hate her as well. Now do you see what I mean?"

"Not in the least, unless you intend to say that the princess was murdered by her servants, and if you said that you would contradict yourself."

"Not at all. We will suppose the princess in the little house with Duroc, and her people waiting for her. Duroc kills her with, or possibly without, premeditation. He does not know how to get rid of the body, and at the same time is fully aware that the footman and coachman would only be too glad to hear that the princess was dead. He goes out and tells them. Perhaps he says that she fractured her skull by falling down the stairs. He asks if they know of any way of preventing the death from being known. The princess is often absent for days and weeks, even months, without giving any one notice of her departure. Couldn't they say they had driven her to a railway station, and also assist him in disposing of the body? He strengthens his appeal by distributing a little money, which is promptly accepted, and the footman, who is young and clever, invents some story and promises to circulate it. It was he who carried the sack to the river. You will observe that this sack was of Russian make, and had probably been used in the princess's stables. As for the Auvergnat hat and coat, they were probably on the box of the brougham and belonged to the footman, who is in the habit of patronizing low dancing and drinking places. He changed his clothes after stripping and decapitating the body."

"Well, and what about the head?"

"I suspect it was burned with the princess's clothes. But to return to Duroc. While I was watching the body he was met by the two young fellows who had been with me, and he joined their supper party. The Hungarian woman noticed his haggard face and absent manner, and was struck by the incoherence of his words. He would neither eat nor drink, and speedily took his leave—in

fact, he behaved altogether like a man with an uneasy conscience. Now I have no more information to give you. If you approve of my theory, I will set to work at once, but I cannot do so without your authorization."

"I must confess, my dear fellow," replied Piédouche's companion, "that I feel as if you had told me a fairy tale, still I repeat it, you have *carte blanche*; only keep us fully informed of your proceedings. In the meanwhile we must know just how much time you will require to prove what you assert—first, that the body is that of the Princess Yalta, and secondly, that Duroc was the murderer."

"Well, to-day is the 9th of April. Will you grant me till the 19th? I hope to succeed before then, but of course I cannot tell."

"Agreed. On the 19th, if nothing conclusive has occurred, you must send me your report, and we will decide on our future course. And now, good-bye. I mustn't make you waste your time."

"I haven't wasted any as yet, and I am now going to call on Prince Yalta. By a little dodge of mine I shall compel him to receive me."

As soon as the visitor had retired, Monsieur Piédouche summoned his valet. "Dominique," he said, "we are authorized to proceed with our work, and if I make ten thousand francs by the job, you shall have a thousand for yourself."

"It's as if I had them in my pocket now," answered Dominique, who was a born optimist.

He was a Belgian by birth, and had had various ups and downs in life. Monsieur Piédouche had met him at St. Petersburg at a time when he was called there to assist the Russian police in investigating some mysterious affairs, and as the fellow spoke four languages, and thoroughly understood the duties of a valet, the detective engaged him, and soon made him a confidential companion, teaching him the business and giving him a share in all the affairs which he investigated for the prefecture of police or for private parties. Since the fall of the Empire, Monsieur Piédouche had held no official position, but worked on his own account, and the authorities did not interfere with him as they were often in great need of his services.

"Now," he said to Dominique, "we must make haste, as we are only allowed ten days. Now this is what I wish you to do. You must apply for a situation as valet at Prince Yalta's to-day. I know he needs one, and it is essential that I should have some one I can depend upon in his house. So go at once and ask to see the majordomo. You know how to manage him."

"Oh, I lived long enough in Russia to understand those people."

"You can lay on his desk three hundred franc notes, and let him understand that if you are not too closely watched you will share with him the profits you will derive by your situation. The bargain will be easily made, I fancy. Then offer to enter upon your duties at once, and as soon as you are located in the house, cultivate the princess's coachman and footman, and especially her maid. You ought to court the girl and get into her good graces."

"I'll have a try," said Dominique.

"Well, you are still a good-looking fellow ; but remember that the girl is very pretty, and when the prince isn't tipsy, he has eyes in his head. That is my private information. Still you may please the girl all the same. You have plenty of cheek at command, and you can speak Russian. It would be a shame for you to fail."

"I think it would be better for me not to mention that I know Russian. The other servants, fancying I could not understand them, would chat together, and I might learn a number of things merely by listening."

"You are right," said Monsieur Piédouche. "The prince and all his people speak French. When the majordomo engages you, he won't ask you if you know Russian. If he does, say, 'No.' Now, we must meet daily. The prince does not rise till noon, so your duties will begin very late. I will be near the fountain in the Avenue Wagram at nine o'clock every day."

"I understand, sir," answered Dominique ; "and I hope the situation will still be vacant."

"Well, if you are not successful in your application, come at sunset into the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. I will meet you there, and we will consult together. Now then, give me my overcoat, and my hat. Quick ! I'm going to see the prince."

Dominique hastened to obey, and helped his master to put on his coat. "Now," said Piédouche, "good-bye ; we may not meet to-night. When you go off, mind you tell the doorkeeper downstairs that I have given you a few days' leave of absence, and that he must take care of the rooms here while you are away."

"All right, sir. I shall engage a room in a little hotel I know of in the Rue Saint Honoré, for I must have an address to give the majordomo. I have a story all ready, too, in case he shows any curiosity as to my antecedents."

"Very good. I am glad to see that you pay proper attention to details. You are always to be relied upon."

Monsieur Piédouche then went off. He crossed the Rue de Rivoli, and the Tuileries garden, sprang into a tramway car running from the Louvre to Saint-Cloud, and alighted at the Pont de l'Alma where the Avenue Montaigne begins. Before calling on the prince he wished to visit the house where the princess had been in the habit of meeting Duroc. This house, as he had previously ascertained, was at the end of a kind of lane leading out of the Avenue Montaigne. At the corner stood a wine-shop where Dominique had previously obtained information, and Piédouche, after noting that the landlord was engaged in serving some customers grouped before his counter, now quietly turned the corner and slipped into the lane. Some dirty children were playing in the gutter, and a few wretched-looking fowls were pecking between the paving stones. Strange that the aristocratic Princess Yalta and Duroc should have met in such a neighbourhood ! The house which was their usual place of assignation was at the further end of the lane. It had two stories

and two entrances, one by an adjacent garden or courtyard, and the other communicating direct with the lane. All the shutters on the street side were closed, and everything seemingly indicated that there was no one inside. "And to think that a princess was willing to come here!" said Piédouche to himself. "It is incredible. If she came to grief here, serve her right. This is really a most cut-throat-looking place, and I feel convinced that when I have examined it, I shall have found all the evidence we require. And now for the key that Dominique gave me. He told me not to try the little street door, but to go in by the gate yonder. I shall be in a nice pickle if the key doesn't fit it." So saying, Piédouche drew a key from his pocket, and after looking around to ascertain that no one was near, he placed it in the lock of a gate which apparently communicated with a courtyard or garden adjoining the house. "It would be a good joke if I were taken for a burglar," he said, under his breath. "I have my detective's card in my pocket; but I would rather not have to show it. No one ought to know that I have ever been here."

The key turned, the gate yielded, and Piédouche, having locked the portal behind him, found himself in a kind of garden quite bare in the centre, but with narrow vegetable and flower beds all round. Climbing plants were withering on the high walls, and in a corner some garden tools were carelessly piled. Everything, indeed, had a deserted and abandoned look. At one end of the open space stood a kind of outhouse with two doors and a zinc roof. "We will examine that later on," said Piédouche, who always proceeded in a methodical manner, and then looking up at the main building he noted with some astonishment that the shutters of two first-floor windows on this side were open. "That is very odd," he murmured; "can any one have been here since Saturday night? It looks as if such were the case, certainly. These shutters must have been closed on Saturday night, for neither lovers nor murderers like to be watched. And if somebody has been here since, it must either have been Duroc or one of his accomplices. But the latter are the princess's servants, and they would hardly have had the audacity to return to the house where they committed the crime. They would naturally avoid this part of Paris, pretend that they had never entered yonder building, and assert that they drove the princess to a railway station, where she left by the first train. Then can Duroc have been here? Why should he have come? He can't mean to move the furniture, whether it be his or the princess's, which I imagine to be the case. No, he wouldn't meddle with it just now. His plan would be to keep very quiet; if his friends venture to question him about the princess, he will say she is travelling, and will pretend to be vexed because she left without bidding him farewell, or saying where she was going. But to work! I have no time to lose if I wish to be at Prince Yalta's by five o'clock. I will first visit that outhouse. I see nothing unusual in this garden court. The soil hasn't been freshly turned over, and

besides, Duroc wouldn't have been stupid enough to bury the princess's head here." Piédouche thereupon approached the out-house, opened one of the doors—the key was in the lock—and crossing the threshold, found himself in a bathroom. There was here an onyx bath-tub with silver faucets in the form of elephants' heads; a Smyrna rug lay on the floor and the walls and ceiling were hung with a Persian fabric.

"Zounds!" cried Piédouche, "this Duroc is a tasteful fellow! but maybe the princess did all this." Everything is fresh and new, not a spot anywhere, so it isn't here that the villains did their work. Let us see if the water runs."

He turned one of the faucets, and some cold water sprang from an elephant's trunk. "But in winter people bathe in warm water. There must be a furnace somewhere," said Piédouche thoughtfully, and thereupon espying a door, he passed into another room with white-washed walls, where he found a stove, a reservoir, some zinc pails and pipes, straw-seated chairs, sponges, brushes, and a chest of drawers for linen—indeed, all the accessories of an elegant bathroom. "It is very well arranged," thought Piédouche; "nothing that an elegant woman would require has been forgotten. It is plain, moreover, that the princess brought someone to wait upon her here. There must have been a woman to light the fire, warm the water, and prepare the bath. It must have been her own maid, her faithful Xenia. The princess had no secrets from her, and it is a pity that she did not bring her here last Saturday, for the girl would have denounced the murderers, even if she couldn't have prevented the murder."

Everything was in order in this room. The drawers were full of fineperfumedlinen; a quantity of ashes in the stove proved that a fire had been recently lighted. The reservoir was nearly full of water, and the tiled floor was as shiny as that of a Dutch kitchen. Piédouche examined everything, and suddenly he perceived that the wall had been scraped in three places—at about a man's height. "Oh! oh! he said, "this wall must have been scraped because there were stains on it. But if the princess was beheaded after death, the blood would not have spurted out, it would merely have run, and the floor here is immaculate."

As he stooped to examine the tiles more closely, he perceived that a large bit of leaden piping had been torn from the bottom of the wall, only two ends of it being left. This pipe had, evidently enough, formerly been connected with the main city conduit, but had probably been out of use for some time, as the reservoir now fed the bath. "I fancy," said Piédouche, "that the lead which was wrapped round the legs of the murdered woman was obtained here; and there, what is that broken chair in the corner over there? Let us see."

Only the frame-work of the chair in question was left; every particle of the straw seat had been removed, and the wood-work, quite white, seemed to have been planed.

"They would have burnt that chair if they could, but they were no doubt out of charcoal and in a hurry. What part can it have played during the murder? They might have laid the body on a table before they removed the head, but they would certainly never have seated it in a chair. It is really most singular, and stranger still, there is not a spot of blood to be seen anywhere. However, there are plenty of sponges, and this is the time to try some experiments."

Piédouche now took two empty buckets, placed them under the faucets of the bath, and filled them three quarters full. Into one of them he threw four large sponges which were on the stove, and then he emptied the other bucket on the tiled floor.

The tiles were not quite level; for the water ran slowly towards the garden door and passed under it. "Good!" exclaimed Piédouche; "it is there that I must look."

He then opened the door, knelt on the threshold, and with the point of a pocket-knife picked out the dirt from between some bricks. This black dirt was mingled with some tiny bits of straw which no longer had its natural colour, and Piédouche, having carefully examined and smelt these particles, exclaimed: "I was right; there's blood here, and it is plain that the head was cut off in that room. It is possible that the princess was struck down just as she stepped from her bath. I shall know that when I have been through the house."

He now took the sponges from the bucket into which he had thrown them. He squeezed them one after the other, and the water that exuded proved of a deep red hue. Thus satisfied as regards the main question, Piédouche now crossed the garden and entered the house. There were two rooms on the ground floor, both of them without doors and quite unfurnished. Giving them just a glance, Piédouche hastily climbed the stairs, where he found two apartments most luxuriously appointed. One of them was arranged as a dressing-room, and the other was full of divans, sofas, and cushions: while against the wall facing the window there stood a large Byzantine cabinet incrustated with gold and malachite. Piédouche at once approached this cabinet, his instinct telling him that if the Princess Morphine had left any trace of herself in the apartment, it would be in this piece of furniture which was full of drawers. Piédouche took hold of the knobs of one of these drawers, but he could not open it, and as he made a fresh effort, he leant involuntarily on a tablet which suddenly turned over, revealing a small hiding-place for valuables. Piédouche uttered an exclamation of surprise on seeing that this secret nook was full of bank-notes. He could hardly believe his eyes, and was both annoyed and bewildered, for this discovery upset his theories. "Who the deuce could have put these notes here?" he asked himself. "Was it the princess? I suppose so. Duroc is a business man, and would never leave money in a place like this. I am astonished even that he did not prevent the princess from committing such a piece of care-

lessness. I fancy she put the money here without his knowledge. It's likely, for this cabinet is evidently hers ; its like could not be found in Paris—it came straight from Russia. And there is a secret spring which turns the shelf, a spring which I touched by accident, and with which Duroc is probably not acquainted. Still I may be mistaken after all."

Piédouche was beginning to feel a little doubtful as to the correctness of his reasoning, when he suddenly decided to count the bank notes. There were three packages of them, each comprising ten rolls pinned together. Piédouche, familiar with the habits of bank-cashiers, speedily counted the sum total : " Three hundred thousand francs ! " he murmured ; " there are here precisely three hundred thousand francs ! "

His face, which had lengthened considerably, now assumed a very different expression. This was precisely the sum that Eric Duroc had taken to the Princess Yalta on the preceding Saturday at his employer's request.

" Oh ! oh ! " cried Piédouche, " I am all right, and can hold to my first idea. It was not merely from jealousy that this young man killed the princess. I am ready to admit that he did not premeditate robbing her, and in fact I can realise how the thing went on. He began by giving her the three hundred thousand francs at her own house, and she handed him the receipt which he took to his employer. However, as she was a woman who never did things like any one else, she then bundled the money into her pocket or into the little leather bag which she always wore at her belt when she went out. After killing her, Duroc naturally recollected the notes, and foresaw that if he took possession of them he might be suspected. The state of his finances would be inquired into, and perhaps his own rooms would be searched, so finally he decided to hide the notes for a time in this secret drawer. I am sure now that it was he who came here since the crime. He came to assure himself that the money was all right, and he will come back again. We shall catch him all right."

Piédouche now asked himself what he should do with the money, and finally he decided for the time being to place it in the secret drawer again. Having done so, he resolved to examine the adjoining apartment, which, as he already knew, was a dressing-room. Just at that moment, however, on a marble console, he espied a small time-piece, the regular tic-tac of which had at first escaped his ear. A glance sufficed from him to assure himself that this time-piece was a simple alarm clock, which required winding up every twenty-four hours. " Ah ! " said he, " I was certain some one had been here since Saturday. That clock wouldn't have been going now if it hadn't been wound up yesterday ; so some one came here, in the afternoon, probably, intending to pass the night on one of the divans. Only intending," added Piédouche ; " for had he remained all night he would have closed the shutters, and they are open. But who was it that came ? Duroc ? He knows that the princess

can never return. But has the fellow no nerves! How can he stand a solitary night under a roof where he committed a murder? I'm puzzled about that." Piédouche stood watching the clock, and cudgelling his brain for a solution to the mystery. "It may be," he murmured, "that Duroc came to see if his treasure were safe, and to guard it, and at the approach of night his courage failed him. He feared burglars, and was still more afraid of ghosts. That is an explanation, to be sure, but not a satisfactory one. I have no time to seek another, however, for I must see the prince at five o'clock. It is now four, and I have not yet completed my investigations."

Piédouche thereupon entered the dressing-room, the windows of which looked out on the street, and as the shutters were closed he found himself in semi-darkness. The only light came through the door of the adjoining apartment. The examination of the dressing-room furnished no fresh clue. Each article was in its place. The ivory brushes and cut-glass bottles were all symmetrically arranged on the various tables. "The princess did not come in here, I'm sure," said Piédouche, "and I need not linger longer. It isn't necessary for me to open the wardrobes to-day. I will go."

He was about to do so, when he stopped short to listen. His hearing was singularly acute, and he felt certain that a noise he had just detected was made by the insertion of a key in a lock, the lock of the house door. "The deuce take it," grumbled Piédouche, "some one is coming." He was not afraid; he had a revolver in his pocket, and was quite able to defend himself, but he did not care for a skirmish, which would spoil matters. Perceiving that the dressing-room door had a bolt on the inner side, he hastily but gently shut himself in, and then, finding that the door key had been removed, he decided to try a look through the keyhole. "Now," he thought, "I can see this visitor. When I leave here I shall know for certain who murdered the Princess Morphine."

Piédouche, with his eye to the keyhole, held his breath and waited for his visitor to appear. Whoever he was, he came up the stairs careless of making a noise, and speedily reached the adjoining room. Piédouche now took a good look, and saw that the new comer was indeed Eric Duroc.

"I was right, as I always am," thought the old detective. "But what does Duroc mean to do? It is to be hoped that he does not intend to enter this room. No, he is going to the Byzantine cabinet, just as I expected." Eric did not go to the cabinet at once, however. He advanced with slow and hesitating steps and looked around him. He was very pale, and there were tears in his eyes. "I was right," thought Piédouche, "he is a sentimental murderer. He is now full of remorse, and yet he has come to fetch the three hundred thousand francs. I'm sorry for it, for I shall be obliged to hasten matters, and take him prisoner, or, at least, follow and watch him; and I haven't yet any proof that the princess has really been killed. When I'm told to cook the dinner, I don't like to send it in before it's quite ready."

Eric now paused near the marble table, and looked at the clock, probably to assure himself that it was still going, and then began to wind it up. For once, Piédouche's sagacity was at fault. Duroc's aim in thus acting entirely escaped him, and he was once more thrown into a vast field of conjecture. "This is very odd," he thought; "and it isn't the first time he has done it, for the clock was wound up yesterday. I believe that he comes here every day after the Bourse, instead of going to make up his accounts at the broker's. But why does he attend to the clock in this punctual manner, as if he wished to leave behind him a proof that he had been here? I wonder if he is mad!"

At last, however, Eric approached the Byzantine cabinet. Was it to count the money? The cabinet stood in such a way that Piédouche could see the young fellow's every movement. The moment was decisive. Eric stood for a few moments gazing at the cabinet with visible satisfaction. Then he opened one of the drawers which Piédouche had neglected to examine, and closed it at once. He did the same with all the drawers, and finally made a gesture of disappointment. He had evidently expected to find in one of them something that was not there. And what this something could be puzzled the concealed observer. There was still the secret compartment to be examined, however, and he expected to see Duroc press the spring. But he was again mistaken.

Duroc moved away without touching it, and remained standing in the centre of the room like a man who is at a loss what to do. Would he try to enter the dressing-room? Piédouche was afraid that he would. But he felt sure that the bolt was strong, and that Duroc would not break the door down. "He will be, of course, very much astonished to find it fastened, but he will suppose that he turned the key the last time he was here. It is to be hoped that the key isn't in his pocket, though!"

Piédouche was soon reassured. Without even giving a glance towards the dressing-room, Duroc approached the windows, after passing his hand over his forehead, in the way that signifies in all countries: "I was forgetting something."

Piédouche, who easily divined the meaning of this pantomime, now saw Eric open the two windows in quick succession, and close the shutters. The result of this was that the room became so dark that Piédouche could see nothing more. But this was of little consequence, as Duroc now descended the stairs and left the house, banging the door, regardless of being overheard. The detective waited for a moment, and then, all being quiet, he decided to emerge from his place of concealment. To tell the truth, the problem was a complicated one, for Duroc had not touched the bank-notes, and Piédouche wondered more than ever if he ought to leave them there. After all, there was no immediate danger. Police surveillance would begin that night. It would be as well to place a guard in the dressing-room, in case Duroc returned to remove the money; and then he could be followed. Piédouche decided to confer with the

people at the prefecture on this point, and then started off to call upon Prince Yalta. He crept down the stairs, stopped for an instant in the courtyard to listen if there were any footsteps in the lane, and finally went his way.

The walk to the Rue de Tilsitt where the Yalta mansion was situated was not a long one, and Piédouche was an excellent pedestrian. "I was wrong in not having two police agents placed at my disposal," he thought, as he hastened onward. "It is true, however, that I could not foresee what has occurred. Discovery has crowded upon discovery. I now know that the woman was killed in the bath-room. I know that Duroc comes to the house daily. I know that three hundred thousand francs are concealed there. However, I have still to make sure that the princess has disappeared, and to clear up two or three minor points. First, why didn't Duroc open the secret place where the money is concealed? and why did he examine all those drawers, which I ought to have opened at the outset? besides, why didn't I look at them before I left?"

"After all, they were undoubtedly empty. Besides, I couldn't have examined them without a light, and I couldn't open the shutters, for Duroc wasn't far off, and had he chanced to look back, he would have noticed the change."

These reflections, and others of the same kind, absorbed Piédouche till he reached the Arc de Triomphe. He then turned into the Rue de Tilsitt and speedily espied the superb residence of the wealthy scion of the Khans of the Crinea. He walked on, throwing back his head and assuming his most dignified air, and soon noticed two servants emerge from the courtyard of the mansion—a coachman and a footman in loose jackets, as if they were off duty, and intended to lounge a little in some wine shop. Piédouche was greatly pleased at this, and as the men came towards him, he began to walk more slowly, so as to take a good look at them. The coachman seemed a thorough Moujik, with high cheek bones, a flat, broad nose, and full beard. He was of medium height, but looked shorter, on account of the extraordinary breadth of his shoulders. He was dressed like a Frenchman, but for a fur cap and Muscovite boots—the combination indicating that he drove horses harnessed in the Paris or Petersburg style, indifferently. "That man has a villainous face," said Piédouche to himself. "It was he who did the deed."

The footman was not in the least like his companion. He might have been eighteen years of age, but did not look more than sixteen, although he was tall. He had evidently grown too fast. But he had never seen Russia; his face was unmistakably that of a cunning and vicious Paris urchin. "You may be very clever," said Piédouche to himself; "but I will bet a hundred to one, that last Saturday night you were swimming in the Seine, and if you have not burned the clothes you then wore, I shall find them in your room. I will tell Dominique to see to that."

As Piédouche passed the two servants, he could hear that they

were speaking Russian, and he noticed that the groom looked up at the windows of the right wing of the house where the princess's private apartments were situated. He punctuated this glance with a grin and a sneer, which Piédouche interpreted in his own way. He even understood one Russian word—a word that signified princess. "Evidently these rascals are very glad to be rid of her, and they are going to drink to their deliverance, with the money they received for disposing of her body." Thus it was that the clever detective argued, congratulating himself that he had introduced Dominique into the house, for he did not doubt the success of his valet's application. Piédouche felt for the moment as if he were monarch of all he surveyed, and rang the bell with an air of authority. A majestic colossus answered the ring. He was a Russian, and would have looked well at the head of a battalion sword in hand. But he wore a livery, with a three-cornered hat and knee breeches. This personage having examined Piédouche, and seeing that he was not a tradesman, said politely, but without waiting to be questioned: "The prince does not receive."

"And the princess is absent?" rejoined Piédouche carelessly. The porter answered in the affirmative and waited. "I am aware of all that," continued the detective. "Have the kindness, however, to take my card to the prince and let him know that I await his orders."

The porter took the card with some reluctance. Piédouche had written a few words in pencil upon it, beneath an assumed name. The porter rang a bell and a footman appeared on the steps, while the detective was admitted into the courtyard. Glancing at the card, the footman instantly said: "I will send this to the prince, and I daresay he will receive you, sir; I have had orders to inform him whenever you chanced to call. Will you please come this way?"

Piédouche did not wait to be asked a second time. The footman showed him into a vestibule full of flowers, and after retiring for five minutes or so, reappeared and said with a low bow: "The prince will receive you, sir."

He escorted Piédouche through a billiard-room and then entered a library with stained-glass windows, where the shelves on the walls were crowded with boxes of cigars in lieu of books. At the further end, near a chimney-piece, where blazed a bright fire, there sat in a magnificently carved chair which resembled a throne a man wearing a silk skirt, embroidered caftan, large pantaloons, and Turkish slippers. He was smoking a long pipe enriched with precious stones, and at the same time watching the play of two gentlemen in black coats and white cravats who were stationed on either side of a chess-board. Piédouche, who had not seen the prince for some years, found him greatly changed. He looked sixty instead of forty. His face was pale, his hair white, his blue eyes had lost all their brightness, and his hands trembled as is usual with those who indulge in opium or alcohol to excess. On a laquered table near him there were several decanters of various

sizes and shapes, all testifying to his ruling passion. Piédouche bowed with an easy air, while the two persons who were playing chess looked up in surprise. The prince, who was accustomed to the most abject respect from every one who approached him, frowned. "It was you who wrote to me yesterday?" he asked.

"Precisely, prince," answered Piédouche, "and you see that I have lost no time in paying you my respects. I trust you will excuse my not waiting for a reply; I was impatient to meet your highness. And I hope you agree with me that ceremony isn't necessary between players of equal strength and ability."

"Then you think you play chess as well as I do?"

"I have never been beaten, and I should like to lose for the first time in my life. I would willingly accept defeat for the honour of knowing you."

"Say rather that you have learned that I pay people a very high price for playing with me."

"You quite misunderstand me, prince. I am rich and ask no favours from any one. I am an American, and am travelling for pleasure. I had heard of you in America, and on my arrival in Paris I ascertained you were here, so I took advantage of the opportunity to write to you. If you hadn't been here, however, I should have gone to Russia to meet you."

This language seemed to surprise the prince. "And do you imagine," he said disdainfully, "that I shall play with you without knowing if you deserve such a favour? These gentlemen here are in my employment, and the reason I retain them is because the weaker of the two has never been beaten except by myself."

"Well, I think that I could teach them a few things," said the detective. The two men exchanged a contemptuous smile which did not disturb Piédouche. "Shall I prove my words?" he asked, seating himself without an invitation. "The whites seem to have lost, eh? Well, the black king can be checkmated in six moves."

"I am curious to see that," answered the prince, ironically.

Piédouche was not idly boasting. He was without his equal at chess, and if his name was not well known at the Café de la Regence, it was merely because he very rarely went there. He had played in England, and had beaten the best men there. He had taken the measure of the two fellows with the prince, and instantly saw that they allowed themselves to be beaten by him, so as to retain their position in his household. Piédouche was right in his prediction, as the event proved. He showed how to checkmate the black king, whereupon the prince exclaimed: "Very good. I will play with you, but I warn you that if you lose you will never set your foot here again."

"And if I win?" asked the spurious Yankee.

"I will give you fifty louis."

"I have the honour to repeat, prince, that this is no question of money. I am a gentleman and I intend to be treated as such. I don't accept those conditions, but I will propose others. If I lose I

will pay you fifty louis, and you need not have your doors closed upon me, as I should never present myself here again."

"And if you win?" scoffed the prince.

"If I win, I venture to hope that you will continue to receive me, and so as to prove that you don't receive me as a mere professional chess player, I shall ask to be presented to the Princess Yalta."

"To my wife!" cried the prince. "You are mad."

"I claim to be in full possession of my faculties," said Monsieur Piédouche, with a smile; "and my request is a very simple one. If you do me the honour to receive me, why should not the princess do the same?"

"Because she has no need of you. She doesn't play chess."

"So I suppose; but if I ask permission to pay my respects to her, it is because I don't wish her to look upon me as one of your employees. My name is Francis Disney; I am a citizen of the United States, and I can go anywhere."

The two salaried players looked fiercely at this interloper, who threatened them with the loss of lucrative employment. The prince had previously begun to suspect that they were not of the highest skill in the noble game he adored. If he had not dismissed them, it was because he did not care to frequent clubs and *cafés* in search of more worthy adversaries. His rank and his vices retained him at home, where every one hastened to gratify his smallest caprice; and he preferred even to be bored rather than make a change in his daily habits. Piédouche, however, was determined to excite the curiosity of this Boyard, who, like all despots, was occasionally pleased to meet a man who resisted him. "Very good," he said, after a long, penetrating look at the so-called Disney, who did not flinch; "I accept the match. If you lose, the thousand francs must be paid down."

"That is my intention," answered Piédouche, placing his hand on a note-case in his breast pocket, which was always well filled in case of emergencies.

"You will give the money to these two persons to indemnify them for the anxiety you have occasioned them," added the prince.

"Most willingly. And if I win?"

"I will send my majordomo to ask the princess if she will receive us."

"That is sufficient, prince. I am now at your orders."

One of the salaried players hastily placed the chess table within reach of his master, and the other set the men.

"Yours is the first move, prince," said Piédouche, courteously.

"Ah! you give me that advantage? You are sure, then, of beating me?" sneered the degenerate descendant of the Khans of the Crimea.

"One can never be sure of these things; but I shall do my best."

"Very good. I warn you that the rules of the game are to be followed strictly. If a piece is touched, for instance, it will have to be played."

"Of course, so far as I am concerned ; but you, prince, may do as you choose."

The game began ; the salaried players stood in the background, and it may well be believed that they offered up ardent prayers for the Yankee's defeat. The prince had read and studied everything that had been written on chess, and retained in his mind enough to make him a dangerous adversary for anyone but a superior player. He began by an apparently reckless move which he had long studied, intending to try it on someone who proved worthy of his steel.

Piédouche, somewhat disconcerted by the audacity of the attack, remained upon the defensive, protecting such of his pieces as were threatened, and having no apparent motive for several moves that he made.

The two spectators laughed in their sleeves, and the prince already looked upon the game as won.

"If you go on in this way, my friend," he said, with a sneer, "you will not be presented to my wife. You have done nothing yet, not even once cried check to the queen."

"I respect queens and princesses," said Piédouche, with a quiet smile.

"That is very noble in a Republican ; but look out for your king. I am getting him into a corner."

"He can look out for himself."

"This time, perhaps ; but look out for the next time I call check. To defer defeat, why don't you attack ? Imagine that my queen is the princess, my wife, and try to take her."

This joke, which was in doubtful taste, concealed a trap which Piédouche saw and avoided. If he had taken the prince's queen at that moment he would infallibly have lost the game. So he again retreated, leading the prince on to the point to which he wished to draw him. This done, in a move or two the game would be over. Suddenly the so-called American unmasked his batteries, and in a moment the prince, who believed himself on the eve of victory, was forced to make every effort to retard defeat. "Check to—will you permit me to say to the princess ?" asked Piédouche, laughing heartily.

"My queen is lost !" grumbled the Russian. "I did not see that move. I shall never learn to control my wandering thoughts, I fear."

"A king without a queen is badly off, and has not long to live, prince. My rook is in your majesty's way. I advance this poor little pawn, your king must take refuge on the white square, and then with my bishop there—"

"Very well, sir, I am beaten," said the prince, as he angrily pushed back the board. "I am not in the mood to-day ; when will you give me my revenge ?"

"Whenever you choose, prince, if you will pay your debt to-day," answered Piédouche.

"I am quite willing ; but I have no idea where my wife is just now ; I have a suspicion that she is not at home. Besides, a man is always allowed twenty-four hours to pay his gambling debts. But, if she is in the house, you can see her as well now as at any other time ; and if she is out you must wait until to-morrow. I will ascertain." And addressing the two dependents, who looked glum enough, the prince added : "Be off with you ! Tell my majordomo that I wish to see him immediately." The two fellows shambled off at once and the prince, alone with his conqueror, resumed : "I warn you that my wife may not choose to receive you. If your face doesn't please her, she is quite capable of turning her back on you without opening her lips, and then you will be shown to the door."

"I shall be satisfied, prince, if you perform your part of our engagement."

"And you will come back to-morrow ?"

"Most certainly. Every day if you like."

The entrance of the majordomo, now interrupted the conversation. "Here, Vladimir !" cried the prince, curtailing the majordomo's obsequious salutations, "go and find the princess, and tell her I wish to see her, either here or in her own apartments, I do not care which."

"The princess," answered the attendant, respectfully, "is not in Paris, your highness."

"Ah ! Where is she, then ?" asked the prince, without evincing the smallest surprise.

"I don't know, your highness. Stephanie and Vacili drove her to the northern station in the blue brougham."

"When, this morning ?"

"Oh, no, your highness. On Saturday evening. The princess dined out that day, and did not return home."

"Very good. Have you found me a valet yet ?"

"Yes, your highness. A person came this afternoon with excellent certificates, and seems to know his duties. Unfortunately he only speaks French."

"That does not matter. Let me see him to-morrow, and if I like him, he can come at once. You can go now ; that is all."

When the door had closed upon the majordomo, the prince turned to Piédouche. "You hear ?" he said. "I can do nothing to-day. When my wife returns I will introduce you."

"I rely on that honour, prince. To-morrow I will call at the same hour, and I have a presentiment that you will be victorious."

"I hope so. Till to-morrow."

Piédouche knew all he wished to know. He had gained a foothold in the mansion, and had learned that Dominique would be established there the next day. He had every reason to feel satisfied with what he had done. Leaving the house he hurried to the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne where Dominique, always punctual, was waiting for

him. The conference was brief, but both master and servant were apt to be concise. "There will be no difficulty with the majordomo," said Dominique, "providing we give him money enough. He made me understand that."

"Very good. We will grease his paw as often as is necessary," answered Piédouche. "But couldn't you learn anything while conversing with this same Vladimir? I saw him—he has a villainous face!"

"No, sir; he was as close as possible. But, as I had plenty of time, I went to a little *café* in the Avenue de Wagram, which the servants of the house frequent. I found the footman and coachman there. They were drinking like sponges, and their pockets were full of gold. I listened to what they said, but I learned nothing interesting."

"Well, we will meet again on the day after to-morrow. Go back to the place where you took a room. I shall take a cab and drive to the prefecture. There must be a sentry placed near that house."

"Ah! I was right then?"

"Yes, my boy; and in three days' time, the murderer will be arrested. You will have a handsome present, and the whole affair will be greatly to my credit."

Dominique received this assurance with infinite satisfaction, and the pair then separated. Ten minutes later, Piédouche entered a cab, saying in a low voice: "Now then, Eric Duroc, we'll have a bout together."

III.

ERIC and Laure Duroc were orphans. Their mother had died in giving birth to Laure, and their father, an architect of great talent, had been killed by a fall from a house, the erection of which he was superintending, on the very day that Eric attained his majority. The young fellow then entered the office of a broker who had been a friend of his father's. He had everything necessary to help him in succeeding at the Bourse : a small capital which was a satisfactory guarantee to his employer, great sagacity and activity, an amiable disposition, and manners which inspired confidence. He soon began to make money, and his brokerages brought him some forty thousand francs yearly, half of which he set aside for his sister. Thus, with one hundred thousand francs, inherited from her father, Laure became quite a little heiress. She kept her brother's house as well as a woman of experience could have done, and her every thought was to spare him care and annoyance. He had never introduced his Bourse friends to her as they mostly led irregular lives like Julien Fresnay. It was not until he had known Edmond de Chemazé for a year that he decided to invite him to his house, being satisfied that he was of better birth and principles than the financial Bohemians who frequented the broker's offices. Edmond was a trifle younger than Eric, and had come from Anjou to utilize both his abilities and some cash left him by an uncle. He had decided to try Bourse work, and obtained a deal of employment from family connections in the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. He did not consider this employment beneath him, and succeeded fairly well in the circle into which he had been thrown by chance rather than vocation. Eric, who appreciated him at his real value, admitted him to intimacy with himself and his young sister, and Edmond fully deserved the favour. Laure, moreover, had pleased him from the first, and he had pleased Laure, but their reciprocal sympathy did not ripen into love for some time. Eric, caught in the toils of the Princess Morphine, had allowed himself to neglect Laure in some degree ; and although she did not make any complaint, she suffered cruelly. She was, moreover, very anxious as regards her brother, and she ended by opening her heart to Edmond de Chemazé, whom she saw daily. Edmond could do but little to reassure her, but he did not conceal from her that he also was extremely anxious. It was in this way that they realized they

loved each other. Then came the night when Eric, confessing his mad passion to his friend, induced Edmond to make a less painful avowal. Occasion had done the rest. The words spoken under the balcony at sunrise resulted in the engagement of Edmond and Laure. As the former had no relatives whose consent he needed, there was no occasion for delay. It was arranged that they should be married on the first of May, and meanwhile Edmond was received at Duroc's house in the most informal manner. His happiness would have been complete, but for the fact that Eric was painfully preoccupied. He also absented himself for long hours in the most mysterious manner. He did not attend the office regularly, and often remained away from home during the night. On the other hand, the Princess Yalta didn't show herself, and Edmond decided that Eric's sadness and strange behaviour were due to her treachery. Time went by, and at length, one evening about a week after the charity ball, it was arranged that Eric, Laure, and Edmond should dine at a restaurant and then attend the opening of the Hippodrome. Edmond had engaged a box, and his friend had shown himself quite willing to profit by it. He did not make the smallest objection to the project, and even seemed much gayer than usual. The two lovers felt that all promised a pleasant evening. Edmond was glad, moreover, to publish his approaching marriage, which he had not yet announced to any one. He knew that all his Bourse associates would be at the Hippodrome that evening, and was sure that his presence with Laure Duroc would be remarked, and that he would be questioned respecting it. The party took a cab, and after a short drive, during which Eric seemed to relapse into gloomy thoughts, the vehicle drew up at the entrance of the Hippodrome.

"What is the number of your box, Edmond?" abruptly asked Duroc, as he alighted.

"Why do you ask that?" questioned Laure. "Surely you are going in with us?"

"Yes, it would be more proper, of course," answered Duroc, after a brief hesitation. "But you must allow me to leave you for a few minutes during the performance."

"Leave us!" repeated Laure, in amazement. "And why?"

"I have a call to make near by," answered Eric, hastily.

"A call at this hour!"

"Yes; a business visit. You know nothing about such things, my dear."

"Do as you choose; but I hope you will not be long."

"Twenty minutes at the outside. And as in three weeks you will be Madame de Chemazé, there will be no impropriety in your remaining with Edmond, and I don't believe that you will miss me."

"Perhaps not—but—"

"Wait until we are seated in the box to tell me the rest. Come, cabs are not allowed to stand before the door."

Edmond had not spoken, but he was by no means pleased. He thought it very indecorous for Eric to leave him alone with his sister

in this way, in the presence of a crowd, comprising so many people who knew them. And he could not imagine where Eric wished to go at so late an hour. "Can that Muscovite woman have returned?" he asked himself. "No—for if she had been in Paris, Eric would not have promised to spend the evening with us. He would prefer to linger under her window in the Rue de Tilsitt, as he did the night she left Paris."

However, he kept his thoughts to himself, offered his arm to Laure, and entered the building, Eric following reluctantly enough. They all three took possession of a front box near the passage where the *habitues* of the Hippodrome, the friends of the lady riders, are apt to stand. The place was crowded, and the performance had begun, so that the entrance of the trio attracted a good deal of attention. Laure Duroc, indeed, soon became the point of attraction for several lorgnettes, and she was well worthy of admiration. Before they were even seated, Edmond observed that his selection of a box had not been a happy one. These boxes were mere compartments, separated by partitions some four feet high, and Edmond noticed that the one adjoining theirs was occupied by the so-called Baroness de Lugos and Lucy Travers, whom he by no means cared to meet. They instantly recognized the two young men whose conduct at the supper on the previous Saturday had so displeased them, and they were quite capable of taking some little revenge. Indeed, Lucy nodded with a mocking smile to Edmond, who pretended not to see her, and the Hungarian cast a languishing glance at Eric, who was profoundly indifferent to her charms. Laure was now absorbed in watching a horse in the ring, and fortunately her lover sat between her and these two women, whose remarks he dreaded. There was no escape from them, as the house was crowded, and every box taken. If he proposed leaving, what would Laure think? She was very anxious to see the new equestrian pantomime which the newspapers had spoken so much about; but the rajahs and their retinue of pretty girls dressed as soldiers would not appear until the close of the performance. There was only one thing to do, which was to occupy Laure's attention so fully that she would not notice the women in the next box.

Several minutes elapsed, the performance steadily progressing, when suddenly Edmond perceived Julien Fresnay some distance off, and was glad to see him; but a moment later he caught sight of Monsieur Piédouche, which did not give him the same satisfaction, as he had a bad opinion of the so-called diplomatist. However, Piédouche was most discreet; he simply raised his hand to his hat and disappeared amid a crowd of loungers in the promenade. Eric, who had not seen him, leant, at this moment, towards his friend. "I am going now," he said, "and shall be back in twenty minutes."

Laure heard these words, low as they were spoken, and turning to her brother said imploringly: "Ah! don't go."

"I must, little girl—some one expects me near here."

"Who is it?"

"You are too curious. It is a fault you must get rid off. I am sure that Edmond agrees with me. I really must go for a brief moment, and better now than later, as I can be back before any of our friends in the house come to pay their respects to you." Thereupon, without waiting for a reply, Eric hurried away.

Edmond did not open his mouth. He was afraid of attracting the attention of his neighbours. "Why did you allow him to go?" asked Laure, with tears in her eyes.

"He wouldn't have heeded me, and I presume he has some business that compelled him to go."

"I have a presentiment of evil."

"Why, he was gay enough at dinner."

"Yes; but as we approached the Hippodrome his face suddenly darkened, and hardly had we arrived when he spoke of leaving us."

"But what do you fear? Eric has no enemies."

"I am afraid of some woman," answered Laure with a blush.

Edmond started. He could not reassure her, for his own fears pointed in the same direction. However, at this moment he heard the baroness commenting audibly on Eric's departure. "It is a way he has," she said.

Laure sat with her fan held in such a manner that it concealed her tears, and Edmond had the good taste not to disturb her. It was now the *entracte*. People lounged up and down the passage behind the boxes, and there was constant chattering on all sides. Some minutes elapsed, when suddenly the noise of an opening door made Laure turn hastily round. She thought it was her brother, as did Edmond; but they were both mistaken, for it was Piédouche entering the next box.

Laure did not know this person, and did not pay the smallest attention to him. But Edmond mentally cursed the ex-diplomatist, and resolved to treat him with bare civility should he venture to speak to him. Piédouche, however, was not deficient in tact, and prided himself on being thoroughly well-bred. He knew that a man can not be too cautious in Paris, where vice elbows virtue so often. So, as he entered the actress's box, he feigned not to see Edmond and Laure. "You were not afraid to recognize us?" cried Lucy Travers to the diplomatist. "I had come to the conclusion that men were all cowards. They are afraid of displeasing the married women of their acquaintance who are here, so they have left us alone all the evening. I wish those fair ladies could hear how they talk about them when they sup with us."

"How bitter you are this evening!" answered Piédouche.

"Well, I am furious with all the young men. They are not so cautious at the Café Anglais."

"There is a time for everything, you know. And you must take the world as it is. Don't you agree with me, baroness?"

"I think," answered Madame de Lugos, "that men are not worth the thoughts we bestow upon them. Do you know, only last Satur-

day, Julien Fresnay, whom you are acquainted with, invited us to supper at a restaurant in the Champs Elysées. We spent the whole night waiting for him. He came at half-past three with two companions. You know them too ; they are in the same office as Julien. One of them was a fair young fellow who looked like a girl ; the other had the head of an Arab chief. Well, would you believe it, they deserted us in half-an-hour. It seems that we did not please their highnesses."

"But Julien was left."

"Yes, and he is the best of the three," answered Lucy Travers. "I told him very plainly what I thought of his friends and their conduct. He tried to excuse them by saying that they were desperately in love. It seems that one of them intends to marry the other's sister, and yet he spends his nights in restaurants with gay parties—an excellent husband he'll make, to be sure."

These venomous remarks were spoken in an audible tone, and it would be difficult to describe Edmond's sufferings. Laure also was greatly disturbed, and the only way to end her trouble was to take her away at once ; but then, there would be no end of remarks if he and Laure went off alone. When, in view of cheering her, he tried to make her talk, he realised that she was listening to the conversation in the next box, and that she fully understood the allusions to her brother and her lover. Unable to endure any more, Edmond at last turned and looked at Piédouche, over the partition, as if to say. "Make that woman hold her tongue, or I shall hold you responsible."

Piédouche understood him, and we must do him the justice to state that he had in no way prompted this conversation, and tried his best to change it.

"What do you think of our Hippodrome?" he asked the baroness. "You have seen the incomparable Elisa in Vienna, but I doubt if you have ever witnessed a finer display than the cavalcade which will come in at the end."

"Oh!" answered the Hungarian, "I was present at several reviews and cavalcades at St. Petersburg, and since then I haven't cared for such things. That spoiled me, you know. By the way, speaking of St. Petersburg, do you know that one of the young men who treated me so shabbily at that supper is very intimate with the Princess Yalta?"

"No, indeed," answered Piédouche, with the most innocent air he could assume, "I wasn't aware of it."

"You astonish me, for it is no secret. I suspected it that night from the warm way in which he defended her. The fiend only knows what she will do with him now that she has him fast in her toils."

These words went like an arrow to Laure's heart. She turned deadly pale on hearing the name of the woman who had bewitched her brother. She had never seen her, and Edmond had never told her anything, but she had felt a sinister foreboding of the truth.

"You are not well," said Edmond anxiously. "Wouldn't you like a little fresh air? The heat here is overpowering, and we can wait for Eric in the Avenue de l'Alma."

"No, I will remain here," murmured the girl, with pallid lips. "I will bear all."

"Don't let us talk of your princess," now said Piédouche in the adjoining box. "She doesn't interest me, baroness. Let us talk rather of the charming house you have bought. You must now consider yourself a Frenchwoman, as you own property in Paris. When shall you ask me to a house-warming in the Rue Jouffroy? I promise I won't go away in the midst of the festivity."

"I will invite you as soon as the house is furnished; but as yet there are only the bare walls. Do you know any good upholsterer who is not too much of a thief? If you do, pray send him to me, and in the meantime tell me something about that tragedy which the newspapers have been talking so much about."

"What tragedy?"

"That affair of the headless woman found on the bank of the Seine."

This time Edmond started. The recollection of his nocturnal adventure had never left his mind, but he had ventured to hope that it was forgotten by the general public, and so the question asked by the Hungarian proved a great shock. "Oh! I have heard very little about the affair," answered Piédouche carelessly. "The headless woman wasn't murdered."

"Indeed? And yet I fancy that if Lucy and I were to tell the Prefect of Police about the brougham and the porter we saw carrying a sack—"

"Why, what possible connection could there be between this meeting of yours and—"

"I am sure that that body was in that sack."

"Good heavens! What an idea!"

"Not so foolish as you may think! And if that brougham, drawn by Orloff trotters, belonged to the Princess Yalta, it would be very droll."

"I must say, baroness, that your imagination runs away with you."

The so-called diplomatist laughed as he said this, but he began to repent of having exposed himself to the Hungarian woman's undisciplined tongue. "The orchestra is announcing the entrance of the rajahs," he exclaimed. "So I will say good-evening."

"And you, also, desert us?" said Lucy Travers, with a smile, but in a tone that was not altogether sweet.

"Alas! business calls me elsewhere. I see Julien Fresnay in the passage, and I must speak to him. I have an important commission to give him." Piédouche rose as he spoke, and Edmond, who was watching him stealthily, noticed that, instead of looking towards Julien, he was exchanging some signs with a shabby-looking person in the passage behind the boxes. A moment later, after bidding the ladies good-evening, the spurious diplomatist went off, and immediately afterwards the man he had made a sign to

strolled forward, and leaned against the door of the box occupied by Lucy and the baroness. Why was he allowed to remain there? thought Edmond still on the watch. The attendants were not so complaisant usually, and it could not be inferred that the stranger had purchased their indulgence, for he was very shabbily dressed. Madame de Lugos and Lucy took no notice of him, however. The rajah's cortege, which had now made its appearance, interested them far more. Lucy knew the names of all the pretty women in the procession, and she and the baroness chattered incessantly. Laure, motionless and silent, gazed at the scene without seeing it, and her lover no longer tried to cheer her thoughts. He himself could think of nothing but Eric's absence. "At last!" he suddenly said, half aloud.

It was Eric returning. Laure, hearing Edmond's exclamation, looked round, and the blood rose to her cheeks. The women in the next box were so absorbed by the display that they did not hear Edmond's exclamation. Eric took his seat very quietly, without, indeed, saying a word as if his absence, which had lasted more than three-quarters of an hour, had been the most natural thing in the world. But Laure was not so easily satisfied. "I thought you would never come!" she murmured.

"I have been expecting you most impatiently," added Edmond, in a whisper—"we have been greatly annoyed by some disagreeable neighbours, and I have been more than once tempted to leave the place."

"What! Have those women—"

"They received a visit from Monsieur Piédouche, and the conversation they held with him was extremely disagreeable. I will tell you about it when we are alone."

"That man is becoming most obnoxious," muttered Eric. "He was lounging about the entrance when I went out, and I found him there again when I came back. Indeed he is at my heels wherever I go. Upon my word, it seems to me sometimes as if he were watching me. I am not disposed to submit to such persecution any longer, and the next time I meet him I shall let him know my opinion in pretty plain language."

"Not here, I trust."

"Of course not, as Laure is with us, but to-morrow at the Bourse I will settle him."

The two friends had spoken in low voices, and the bray of the orchestra was such, that even Laure had not heard them; still, by the expression on her brother's face, she divined that he was hearing something of the annoyance of the evening. "The dresses are magnificent, and the whole spectacle superb; but the heat here is really intolerable," she now said, looking at Edmond.

He understood her at once. "You don't look well," he replied, "and, perhaps it would be better—"

"If you don't care to remain any longer, I am quite ready to go," said Eric.

"Yes, at once," answered his sister faintly. "I don't feel well."

Edmond did not delay one moment. He was eager to escape Lucy and the baroness, and also the man who seemed to have mounted guard near their box. He rose to call the attendant who had Laure's wraps in her charge. She was in the corridor, and as she appeared, the man, who had been watching the preparations for departure, quietly disappeared. Edmond observed this, and became very uneasy. Who was it that was thus watched? Eric, perhaps—but why? Edmond was weary of racking his brains; he now only thought of getting away from this mysterious surveillance. "I must have a serious talk with Eric," he said to himself, as he followed his friend, who had Laure on his arm.

They reached the exit without again seeing the man who had been watching them, and Edmond sent a messenger for a cab. At that moment, however, a gentleman, a stranger, approached Eric and courteously requested permission to say a few words to him. Eric, greatly surprised, hesitated for a moment; but finding it impossible to refuse a request made with so much politeness, he signed to Edmond to give Laure his arm, and then stepped aside with the stranger. The colloquy was brief. A moment later and Eric returned to his sister. "I am obliged to leave you again," he said. "I did not find the person whom I wished to see, and I now understand he is here. It is a matter of great importance, which I dare not postpone. Edmond will take you home." He spoke in a tone of suppressed excitement. His eyes sparkled, but he did not seem to have heard any unpleasant intelligence, for his face was more animated than usual; it was, in fact, almost joyous. And as Laure did not reply, he said, gaily: "Surely, little girl, you are not crying? I did not suppose that you could be so childish. Take Edmond's arm, and remember that in three weeks time you are to be his wife, and must learn to do without me."

"We will wait for you here," said Edmond, who did not place much faith in the talk about business.

"By no means. I should detain you too long. Try and make Laure a little more reasonable if you can." And Eric hurried away. The gentleman had stood on one side during this conversation, and Duroc, on joining him, now asked: "Where is she?"

"In the manager's room," answered the obliging stranger. "She came to purchase an Arab horse that attracted her attention here last week. I think the bargain is concluded, but the manager, being very busy, begged her to wait a few minutes until he was disengaged."

"How did she know that I was here? I did not see her."

"She came through the stables, and saw you from there. When you rose to leave, she sent me to tell you that she wished to speak to you at once. I am a partner in the business, and she described you so perfectly that I had no difficulty in recognizing you. You will excuse me, I trust, for addressing you when you were not alone."

"Oh ! I was only with my sister and my brother-in-law."

"Here we are. Please mount these few steps, sir."

Eric followed his guide, who soon stopped before a door near which a Garde de Paris was seated. This man at once rose and opened the door. "Walk in, sir," said the manager's partner to Eric. There was a great change in his manner, but Eric did not notice it. He entered the room, and was astonished by its appearance ; it was simply furnished with a table and two rush-seated chairs. The Garde de Paris now closed the outer door, while the amiable stranger passed on into an inner room. Eric, momentarily left alone, probably asked himself some disagreeable question, for his face darkened considerably. However, the stranger suddenly returned, exclaiming : "Come, they are waiting for you."

The man's manner was now the very reverse of courteous, but the moment was ill-chosen to ask the meaning of his impoliteness. So Eric merely shrugged his shoulders, and passed into the next room, where a man with a rosette in his button-hole sat at a table. Eric at first supposed that this was the manager of the Hippodrome ; but he was about to ask to whom he had the honour of speaking, when the personage pointed to a chair. "Sit down," he said.

"Why should I sit anywhere ?" asked Duroc, coldly. "It was not you whom I came to see. I was told that the Princess Yalta was waiting for me."

"And you expected to find her here ?"

"If I had not thought so, you may be quite sure I shouldn't have come."

"You know very well that she is dead ?"

"Dead ! What is this stupid jest ?"

"Very good. So you are determined to play a part. However, just now when you were told that she wished to speak to you, you turned ghastly pale. At present you have regained your self-possession. You needed only a few seconds' reflection to understand that if you refused to come you were lost. It would have been almost admitting that you had killed her."

Eric started and looked earnestly at the gentleman who thus spoke. "Before I reply," he said, "I wish to know who you are ?"

"I am a police commissary, and I warn you that you are charged with having murdered the Princess Yalta."

"What a preposterous accusation !"

"You deny it, then ? Do you also deny your intimacy with her ?"

"I deny it absolutely."

"Take care. Twenty witnesses will depose that the princess openly went to the Bourse for you in her carriage, and took you away with her."

"The princess entrusted all her speculations to me, but that was all."

"It would be very easy to prove the contrary. Let us admit, however, that her connection with you was entirely of a business character. Why, then, has this connection been so suddenly broken off ?"

"I was not aware that it was."

"But she never comes to the Bourse now. And there must be some reason for that change in her habits."

"She has left Paris. She is travelling, as she does very often."

"Ah! She is travelling? Since when, may I ask?"

"She left Paris about a week ago."

"In point of fact, she disappeared last Saturday night. You dined together that day at Asnières. You were seen there by more than one person. Now, what did she do afterwards?"

"How should I know, if I left her and returned into Paris?"

"This is your explanation, then?"

"I offer no explanation. I do not intend to answer your questions any further."

"I beg your pardon. You will answer me, for you will feel that it is wiser for you to do so. Have you seen the princess since that Saturday evening?"

"I have not."

"Has she not written you?"

At this unexpected question Eric showed some agitation. He flushed and lowered his eyes, but in a moment he had regained his self-possession, and answered disdainfully: "What is it to you whether the princess has written to me or not?"

"Don't you see that if she has written to you since her disappearance you have only to produce her letter to justify yourself?" Eric quickly raised his hand to his breast pocket. "The letter must be dated and post-marked, however," continued the commissary; "for the point you have to establish is that she was living after last Saturday night." Eric did not reply. "Your silence proves that you have received no letter from her since that day," resumed the official. "You do not know, you say, where she went after you parted that night. Very good. But you know where you went, and what you did. Shall I remind you about it all? Well, you took supper between three and four in the morning at a restaurant in the Champs Elysées. You were there but a short time; it was dawn, however, when you left with one of your friends, the one who was with you to-night at the Hippodrome, and who will soon be your brother-in-law."

Eric uttered an angry exclamation. He asked himself who had told the police of his presence at this supper? It was not Edmond, of course. Julien Fresnay might have mentioned it, however, without any malicious intention, and of course the two women had no reason for remaining silent. "They denounced me to Piédouche," he thought. "And that man is a spy!"

"You see that I am fully informed," continued the commissary, after a pause. "I therefore have the right to ask where you went after leaving the princess, who returned to Paris with you."

"And I have the right not to tell you. I prefer to leave you to draw your own inferences, and to interpret my refusal as you choose."

"Your scruples are all the more meritorious, as there is absolutely

but one thing left for you to do, which is to establish an *alibi*. If you can prove that from nine o'clock in the evening to three in the morning you were with some one else than the Princess Yalta, the accusation will fall to the ground, for it is known that the murder was committed at midnight. Believe me, obstinacy won't help you."

"You assert that the Princess Yalta was murdered last Saturday. How is it then that no one has spoken of her death? All Paris knows her. She has a husband, and any number of servants. How is it none of them have discovered her death?"

The commissary bit his lips. It was not yet time to speak of the discovery of the ghastly corpse in the sack, or to bring the prisoner face to face with the coachman and footman, who were under surveillance, but not yet arrested. "I am not required to give you information respecting the proofs we have in our possession. You will know everything in due time," answered the commissary, in a severe tone. "But I will tell you where you passed the night of the 5th of April."

"Tell me, then!" cried Duroc audaciously.

"You spent it at a house in a narrow lane or street between the Avenue Montaigne and the Rue Marbeuf. You took this house at the end of last summer. You paid a year's rent in advance. Did you yourself furnish it?"

Eric understood the insulting insinuation, and could not resist repelling it. "Do you mean that I allowed it to be furnished for me by some woman?" he asked hastily.

"I mean nothing. I simply asked you that question to obtain the very reply you have made. You admit that you are the tenant. Very good. We were already aware of that fact. However, perhaps you won't admit that on Saturday evening you drove in an open carriage along the Avenue Montaigne with the Princess Yalta. You entered the house in the lane with her, and she never left it."

"She did not enter it. She dropped me at the door and drove away."

"Witnesses assert that the carriage went off, but that the princess remained with you."

"If they do say that they either tell a deliberate falsehood, or else they are blind."

"At all events you went in, and why?"

"Because I thought she would come back; but she didn't, although I waited till midnight."

"And then you went—"

"To her house, where I waited under her windows."

"A most singular thing to do. You thought that she would receive you?"

"No; I merely wished to know if she were at home. There was no light in her apartments, however, and I hoped she had gone off. It proved to be so, for after waiting two or three hours I saw an empty carriage arrive. She is in the habit of going off in this

way whenever the fancy takes her, without giving a hint of her intentions to any one."

"It is a most improbable and eccentric proceeding. Besides, I know no railway line that sends out trains at two o'clock in the morning."

"Nor do I," answered Eric, impatiently. "But if you feel any interest in this absurd affair, question the princess's servants. They may be able to tell you where she has gone."

"Her servants? Oh! they will keep their mouths shut. At least two of them—the coachman and footman were your accomplices."

"Accomplices!" repeated Duroc, angrily. "You persist then in accusing me of having murdered a woman who is still alive, as I hope and believe. Oblige me by telling me where and why I committed this crime?"

"Oh, you committed it in the bath-room of the house where you received her—the bath-room in the outhouse."

"Then you have found her body there?"

"No; you have hidden it too well."

"Then on what basis do you assert that she is dead?"

"The bath-room bears traces of the murder. Blood has been found everywhere."

"Ah! I am curious to see the place."

"You shall see it. You will be taken there."

"But you will surely tell me what possible interest I could have in killing her. If I loved her, as you assert, she surely was not my enemy."

"It would not be the first time that a lover has avenged an infidelity. But it is not necessary for us to furnish motives for your acts. Please explain why you have returned to the house since the princess's disappearance? Oh! you have been there every day since last Saturday. You have gone there regularly on leaving the Bourse, and have repeatedly returned in the evening."

"I will admit that your information is correct. But, really, I can't see how this proves that I have murdered any one. If I were guilty I don't think I should set my foot in the house where I had perpetrated such a crime."

"Well, I ask nothing better than to have your innocence established. Come, tell me why you went to the house?"

"You wish to know why I went there? I went in the hope of finding a letter from the princess. She often leaves Paris very suddenly; and it was agreed between us long ago that whenever she went off in that way I ought to go every day to the pavilion to receive the letters she might send through her maid, who is devoted to her. This girl was to take the letters herself, and place them in the drawers of a piece of furniture which belongs to the princess."

"A singular letter-box. It would have been more simple to write you by post."

"The princess does not like simple means."

"And since her departure you have found nothing in those drawers? Well, the explanation is an ingenious one," said the commissary, shaking his head like a fencing master, who reluctantly admits that an adversary of inferior ability has effected an admirable parry. Then he continued with a careless air, "I am no longer surprised that you went there this evening."

"How did you know that?" asked Eric quickly.

"Oh! I know a great deal more. I know that you simply came to the Hippodrome because it was near that house, and that you left your sister to go in search of a letter which you did not find. But didn't you find something else?"

"What do you mean?" stammered Eric.

"I mean that a certain piece of furniture is very useful. Even valuables may be concealed in it, as it is full of secret compartments."

"Of which I know nothing."

"Is that so? I fancied that you knew all about them. Please let me look at the pocket-book which you have about you. Oh! you know what I mean."

Eric had turned very pale, but he did not speak. "So you won't answer?" said the commissary. "Perhaps you will reply, however, when I have told you what I know. You went to that house this evening as usual; you opened the drawers of the piece of furniture in which the princess is in the habit of placing her letters, and you found nothing. But to-night you also opened a secret compartment and took out a bundle of bank-notes. You counted them, and put them into your pocket, and then immediately left the house."

"You were there watching me, then?"

"Some one certainly saw you; that is all that I can tell you. You can make no denial, for you have the sum about you. It does not belong to you, I suppose?"

"No, it does not. I presume it is the property of the Princess Yalta. She is quite wealthy enough to forget three hundred thousand francs in a piece of furniture."

"So you pretend that she hid this money there, instead of keeping it about her. For what reason?"

"I do not know."

"And when did she place it there?"

"I cannot say."

"It is not since last Saturday, for according to you she left Paris on Saturday night."

"No; it must have been before that date, but it was entirely without my knowledge. If the princess had informed me of her intentions, I should have earnestly implored her not to leave such a large sum in an empty house. I discovered it by accident to-night, by accidentally pressing a spring which moved a panel."

"And you were much astonished?" said the commissary, with a sarcastic smile.

"So astonished that I could hardly believe my eyes."

"I dare say. But as these bank-notes were not yours, why did you take them?"

"I only did so after hesitation, and only because I considered it unsafe to leave them there. I had reasons to think, moreover, that the princess would never go there to fetch them."

"Ah! And what were these reasons?"

"I will frankly confess that our connection was entirely broken off; we separated after a quarrel, and for a week I have not had a line from her, and I wished to send her this money."

"It would have been much more simple to send her the piece of furniture in which you found it."

"I wished to do so, but that would have involved a certain amount of delay, and I did not like to leave the money in the house, lest burglars might make away with it."

"Well, I will tell you what I think on the matter. On Saturday, at six o'clock, you went to the Rue de Tilsitt, on behalf of your employer, to hand the Princess Yalta the sum of three hundred thousand francs, which she had made in her last speculations."

"You are right. I took her the money, and she gave me a receipt, which is now in the safe at the office."

"Precisely; and the sum was exactly three hundred thousand francs?"

"Yes, just the sum, in fact, which I found in the cabinet. This was, of course, to me conclusive proof that the princess had placed it there."

"Oh, indeed! Well, we believe that she had the money about her when you killed her, and that, not daring to take it away lest your apartments might be searched, you yourself hid it where you thought no one would ever find it. You were not, however, entirely at your ease, and your daily visits to the house were simply to ascertain if the treasure was safe. A week elapsed without anything taking place. The newspapers said nothing about the disappearance of the princess, and the prince evinced no uneasiness, so you concluded that it was safe for you to take the money. You selected this time of night for doing so, and showed a good deal of cunning in doing so. But you did not imagine that you were watched, and had been ever since the day after the crime was committed, and consequently you ran into the trap that had been laid for you. A man, you know, can't think of everything."

"And so," murmured Eric, despairingly, "it was not enough to accuse me of murder, but now you add robbery."

"I do not say that theft was the motive of the murder, but it was at least its consequence. Come, you had better confess. You pretend that the money was hidden, and then forgotten, by the princess. But she received it from you at six o'clock, and you did not leave her until nine; besides, you tell me that she dropped you at the door of the house, which she did not enter."

"Not then, but she could have done so later on."

"Only between midnight and three o'clock in the morning, and yet you say that she left Paris before dawn."

"She may have returned without my knowledge."

"We know that she has not been home, however, and it would be preposterous for you to assert that she had gone some night to the house where you were in the habit of meeting, merely to leave this large sum of money there."

Eric, since the beginning of this examination, had passed through every phase of emotion—stupor, anger, and dismay. His pride was now wounded, and, raising his head, he said, coldly: "Enough, sir. I see that your mind is made up, and I shall make no further replies. I have nothing to fear, as I have nothing to reproach myself with. Order my arrest, if you choose."

"I am unfortunately obliged to do so," answered the commissary, "but I shall endeavour to make matters as easy for you as possible. Your good antecedents and your social position require this. We can leave here together. My men are waiting with a cab which you will enter. No one will imagine that you are arrested. You must hand me, however, the bank-notes, and your pocket-book. I cannot leave such a large sum with you, even during your brief drive, for I myself cannot go with you, and must place you in the charge of my assistants."

"Whom I might try to corrupt. You need not fear. I shall not think of making my escape, and here is the money." So saying, Eric tossed his pocket-book and the bundle of bank-notes upon the table. The commissary counted the notes and put them in his pocket. He and Eric then left the room together; emerging from the building by a doorway on the Boulevard de l'Alma. There were a few cabs waiting near by, and one of them was guarded by two plain clothes policemen. Eric was walking towards this vehicle with the commissary, when suddenly he saw Edmond de Chemazé approaching him. "I have found you at last," said Edmond.

"But not for long," answered Duroc. "I am under arrest."

"Under arrest!"

"Yes, and accused of murder and theft. That is all. It is absurd, is it not? Where is Laure?"

"In a cab close by. She would not consent to go away, and when she hears—"

"Tell her whatever you like, my dear Edmond—the truth or any story that you may choose to invent. I leave you to decide, and I confide her to you until I am set at liberty, which will, of course, be very soon." Edmond began to expostulate, but Eric continued, "You must say no more, or this gentleman will think that you intend to release me from his clutches. Good-bye, try and comfort Laure. The mistake will soon be cleared up, and this foolish affair will end."

"I am ready, sir," added Duroc, addressing the commissary who had not been able to say one word during this colloquy which he would gladly have prevented had it been possible. Edmond was

in consternation. He fully understood that any interference would be useless, and he thought of the young girl, who was wild with anxiety. He hastened back to her while his friend drove away.

The commissary had nothing more to do at the Hippodrome. Little did it matter to him that Laure Duroc was weeping, and that her lover was now telling her the horrible truth. The official was anxious to see Piédouche, who was waiting for him in the house where the murder had been committed. He hurried there, and found the great detective in the court-yard. "It is done," he cried as he approached, "I have him fast."

"Then my little game proved successful," answered Piédouche, "I knew very well that he would allow himself to be caught."

"I am greatly puzzled by his conduct, however, so much so that I am inclined to believe that he really expected to see the princess."

"What!" cried Piédouche; "you can't have any further doubts if you found the three hundred thousand francs in his possession?"

"I found them, and have them in my pocket. Indeed, I do believe he is guilty of the theft. But my subordinate was greatly astonished by his manner when he told him that the Princess Yalta wished to speak to him. Duroc did not seem to be either startled or astonished, but replied, 'I will follow you at once, only allow me to say a few words to the persons who are with me.'"

"Didn't I tell you that he was clever? He knew very well that if he refused to follow it would be tantamount to admitting that he had killed her. However, what did he reply to your questions?"

"At first he denied everything, whereupon I told him part of what we knew; and he then admitted that it was he who had taken this house to receive the princess. But when I declared that he had murdered her, he protested so earnestly, and so naturally, that I really did not know what to think."

"He is a good actor then—that is the explanation. But how did he explain his search of the drawers?"

"He says that he expected to find a note from the princess, who often sent her maid to deposit letters in the cabinet."

"Well, that wasn't much of an explanation! And the three hundred thousand francs which the police agent, whom I had concealed in the house here, saw him pocket this evening, what did he say about them?"

"That he did not know the money was there, and that he discovered it by accident and took it away to keep it safe."

"Tut! tut! that is worse still. If the princess concealed the bank-notes, Duroc had no right to touch them. But he knows very well that it was he who concealed them in the cabinet after the murder. He removed them to-night, and with such proof as that against him, any jury would find him guilty. Ah!" continued Piédouche with assumed modesty, "I certainly don't pretend that I am never mistaken, but I must say that it seldom happens. At first it was thought that nothing could be done in this business as there were no clues. I asked you to give me until the 19th of

April to unravel the mystery. To-day is the 12th, and I have already handed you over the murderer."

"That is to say, we have arrested a man against whom grave presumptions exist, but we have no absolute certainty."

"There never is any certainty until the close of the trial. But I'll bet that Duroc will make a confession before being placed in the dock. It is the only thing he can do."

"I sincerely hope it will be so, but at present there is not the slightest indication of anything of the kind. Besides, we shan't be able to prove the murder beyond all doubt, till the princess's head is found—and shall we ever find it? Counsel for the defence might insinuate that the corpse was that of another woman."

"Oh! we can prove Duroc's guilt even if he has annihilated the head. A good deal has already been accomplished. We know that the murder was committed in this house; we have arrested a man who concealed here an enormous sum of money, and who came daily to see if this money was safe. We know that he carried it away, and we know that he dined that Saturday with the Princess Yalta, and that he was her lover."

"Which is a great deal, but not enough. We know no more of the princess than we did on the first day of her disappearance. What do the prince and the servants think of her disappearance?"

"Well, as you know, I spend two hours every day playing chess with the prince, and Dominique, my faithful valet, has left my service to enter the prince's, so that between us we keep a strict watch over both master and servants."

"Very good. And what have you learnt?"

"The prince is convinced that the princess left Paris on Saturday very suddenly for a château she owns in Finisterre. The servants pretend to believe the same. But the coachman, Stephane, and the groom, Vacili, know all about it. It was Stephane who drove the brougham, and Vacili who carried the sack. They helped Duroc to commit the murder and not for nothing, for they are now rolling in money. I suspect they were assisted by Xénia the maid. She has vanished like her mistress; and the majordomo Vladimir, who isn't in the secret of the crime, fancies that the princess took her to Brittany with her, but I believe she has gone to Russia."

"But these are only suspicions, and kitchen gossip."

"Excuse me, Dominique understands Russian perfectly well, and these scoundrels are not aware of it, so they talk at their ease in his presence. More than once they have alluded to a certain midnight drive near the river, and Vacili, the groom, even said that in spring-time the water of the Seine was much warmer than that of the Neva."

"Most significant words, I admit. The fellows will deny ever having uttered them, of course, but other proofs will turn up. You must see as I do that the time has come to arrest these men. Every one in the department who knows anything of the matter wonders why it hasn't been done already."

"I should prefer to wait, for I do not wish to appear on the scene as yet. If my young Bourse friends who served me so well without knowing it, should ever learn that I work for you, I should be given the cold shoulder for ever, and shouldn't be able to serve you any more. Duroc doesn't suspect as yet that it was I who saw him here; and the prince believes me to be a Yankee, madly fond of chess. Dominique must have time to decamp, and you must manage so that he may not be summoned as a witness. As for your agents, they are paid to be discreet, and besides, there are only three of them who know me; and, by the way, I must not forget to tell you that I have ventured to send the one who was stationed upstairs away. Further surveillance was useless as the bird was caught."

"To-morrow morning I will affix seals to the doors, cupboards, and drawers, leave merely one man in the lane."

"That is all that will be required. At present we agree upon all points, and we must admit that everything has succeeded admirably this evening. It was by the merest accident that I went to the Hippodrome. I saw Duroc arrive with his sister and her future husband, and I intuitively felt that the finish of this affair was close at hand. Fifteen minutes later Duroc went out. I knew where he was going, and I knew, also, that you were at the circus. I sent to inform you that I had something to tell you. You were kind enough to come to me when I sent you No. 7 to say there was something fresh. While we were talking, No. 6 came to report that he had seen Duroc take the money from the secret drawer. I sent him back to his post to remain there until he received fresh orders. Duroc had then just returned to the Hippodrome. I briefly recapitulated my intended movements. You accepted my plan and gave your instructions accordingly. I pointed Duroc out to your subordinate, and then I came here to wait for the result which has so far exceeded my hopes."

"Yes, and the chief will be greatly pleased, I am sure of it."

"Well, we have nothing more to do here and had better be off. I feel the need of a game of whist at my club to reward me for such a laborious evening. But what is the matter, you are not listening to me?"

"No—I am looking. Don't you see that there's a light on the first floor of the house?"

The pair had remained talking in the garden court of the mysterious little house, and no one had certainly entered the grounds by the gate. Piédouche now looked up at the building and seeing a light as his companion had stated, he was, at first, somewhat disconcerted. "Oh," he said, at last, "your agent must have returned by the little door by which the house communicates direct with the lane. You know that he has a key?"

"But why should he have returned if you sent him away?"

"He must have forgotten something."

"That is no reason why he should disobey orders. I myself positively forbade his having a light."

"But if it were not he? Indeed, it must be the countess's footman and coachman. They probably fancy that Duroc has left some money here, and they have come to search for it."

"Then what shall we do?"

"Go upstairs of course, and catch them in the act."

"Oh! they won't let themselves be taken; they must be armed."

"And so am I. I have a revolver in my pocket, and will keep them at bay while you bring assistance. They don't know that we are near, and we can move very softly and surprise them. There is a carpet on the stairs, and I know the way. You have nothing to fear."

"Oh! I am not afraid."

"Then follow me," said Piédouche, delighted that he was once more allowed to take the lead. He and his companion had spoken in whispers, and from the first floor not a sound of their talk could be heard. The passage door was open. Piédouche went first and the commissary willingly followed. When half way up the stairs, they distinctly heard some one hastily opening and closing a number of drawers in quick succession. Piédouche held his revolver in his hand. "If they only speak," he reflected, "I shall recognize their voices. But perhaps there may be only one of them, the footman probably—he is more of a rascal than the other—I shall be glad of that, for he won't attempt to defend himself."

Piédouche, who now thoroughly believed that he had his man, stopped short on reaching the first landing. The door of the sitting-room stood open, and by the light of five candles blazing in a candelabrum on the mantle-shelf, he saw the Byzantine cabinet with a woman standing in front of it. She was so absorbed in what she was doing that she did not hear the police officials approach, but went on searching the drawers without turning her head. Piédouche was almost stunned by what he beheld. All his conjectures were at fault, when a sudden recollection came to his aid. "How foolish I am!" he murmured. "It is the Cossack maid Xénia, who has come after the bank-notes; I felt sure that she was one of the gang. We will frighten her well, but not with the revolver."

Thereupon he replaced his weapon in his pocket, and walked into the room, followed by his companion. The woman turned and Piédouche recoiled. No wonder that his surprise was great. He had recognized the Princess Yalta, dressed in a travelling costume, trimmed with costly fur. She did not evince the slightest surprise, but advanced to meet the two men, sharply asking: "Who are you? and what do you want? If you are burglars, I warn you that my people are close by, and I can summon them." So speaking she took hold of a gold whistle hanging from a chain about her neck and approached a window as if to open it.

"We are not burglars," stammered Piédouche.

"How did you enter this house?" she asked, haughtily.

The commissary, who did not know her, failed to understand this scene. He was amazed by the sudden change in Piédouche's

manner and by his humility, and imagining that this woman was the maid Xénia, an accomplice, he was about to speak with authority. But Piédouche, having recovered himself, gave him an admonitory touch with his elbow and said, bowing : " Excuse me, madame, but I am a foreigner. I have but lately arrived in Paris, and I am desirous of renting this house. I came to visit it with this gentleman, the landlord, who has the key of the court gate."

" This house is not to let," answered the Princess, " I occupy it."

" It was let for six months, which expired yesterday ; and so the owner brought me to see it."

" What ! at eleven o'clock at night ? This is a preposterous tale, and I advise you to leave the house at once."

" Certainly, madame. We propose doing so ; and I assure you that I regret having been so indiscreet."

Piédouche bowed low and dragged his companion away with an air of authority, which prevented all objections. Once in the street, however, the commissary said : " Will you kindly give me an explanation of your singular conduct ?"

" That woman was the princess herself," answered Piédouche.

" So I suspected ; and I now know what to think of your famous method. You have placed us all in a pretty position. That woman is in the best of health, and yet I have sent a respectable young man to prison for having killed her. I must have him set at liberty."

" Don't do that ! He didn't kill the princess, to be sure, but he robbed her. You have the proof of that in your pocket ; and you have just seen Madame Yalta examining the drawers of the cabinet in search of the money that she herself put there. Besides, even if the princess be alive, I am sure that some one was killed in the bath-room ; and I feel certain that the princess' servants, Stephane and Vacili, were mixed up in the affair. Ah ! there they are."

Piédouche and his companion had by this time reached the end of the lane, and at the corner of the Avenue Montaigne they saw a brougham waiting. The coachman held the horses' reins and the footman was pacing the sidewalk. " The princess seems to trust these men," said the commissary, with an ironical smile.

" Ah ! my dear sir," replied Piédouche, " you no longer trust me, that's plain. But I am neither surprised nor hurt. I went off on a false scent ; but I shall ask no further help from you. I shall act alone, and upon my own responsibility. Release Duroc or keep him, I don't care. I shall go my own way."

" Another plan ! If it be as successful as the first one—"

" No, I have no plan. I may have one shortly, but at present I don't see the next move on my chessboard very clearly. The headless woman isn't the princess : that point at least is clear. But this body was removed by her people, and I have gained a footing in her house, Dominique also, and I swear that I won't be defeated."

" Well, I think I may promise that you won't be prevented from trying to find out the truth. But if Duroc is tried for stealing the money, the princess must be examined."

"She can be questioned about the robbery, and not about the murder. However, your chief must decide. I have only one more question to ask you. Duroc gave you a pocket-book with the bank notes—have you examined its contents?"

"No. Why?"

"Because you might find some letters in it—letters that would perhaps assist us. The princess wrote to him very often, remember. He himself said that he went to the house daily to see if there were anything in the drawers of the cabinet."

"If there are any letters in the case, I ought not to show them to you after what has taken place this evening; but as there may be some document which might throw light on this affair, and at the same time prevent you from being guilty of any fresh folly, let us have a peep at the contents. I sha'n't visit you again, and you had better not show yourself at the prefecture. Let us stop under this street lamp; the examination will be soon over."

Piédouche realised that he could no longer count on the assistance of the authorities, and before beginning his campaign alone he wished to find out all he could.

"Some certificates, visiting cards, three notes of one hundred francs, and one of fifty," said the commissary. "There is nothing to interest you in all that. Ah! here is a note—"

"With a coroneted crest," interrupted Piédouche, whose eyesight was very keen. "It must have been written by the princess."

"You are right; and it is not tender either. She treats her lover as if he were a fool. She reproaches him for not having beaten her, and in short expresses the greatest contempt for him. It is a positive dismissal, given last Saturday, for she speaks of leaving Paris at once."

"Well," said Piédouche, "I will draw no conclusions just now. I must wait before I can form any opinion, and longer still before I communicate it to you."

"Just as you please. Are you going home?"

"I am going to the Hôtel Meurice, where I am now staying under the name of Francis Disney so as to deceive Prince Yalta."

"And I must go to the prefecture. Heaven only knows how I shall get out of this scrape which you have drawn me into."

"You will forgive me, though, won't you?"

"Yes, I bear you no malice," said the commissary, and he cordially shook hands with Piédouche.

The latter looked placid enough until he was alone, but then he flew into a rage. "No, they sha'n't release you," he muttered. "You stole the money, and I will prove it. As for this princess, who has reappeared at such an inconvenient moment, simply, as it seems, to disgrace me, I will have my revenge on her—her resurrection will cost her dear." Piédouche would have done better to upbraid himself, but wounded vanity is blind.

At the very moment when he vowed that Eric Duroc should be ruined, Edmond de Chemazé swore to rescue his friend.

IV.

It was with great difficulty that Edmond soothed Laure. She suspected the truth, and Edmond felt that he must equivocate, rather than tell her the facts, and drive her to despair. He confessed that Eric had gone to join a woman who had fascinated him ; comforted Laure as well as he could, and left her at her own door after a sad drive. He promised to return the next day, begged of her to feel no uneasiness should she not see Eric in the meantime, and even implied that her brother might be absent several days.

As Edmond walked away, harassed and anxious, he swore to rescue his friend, but hardly knew how to begin. He knew that Eric was arrested, but had no idea where he had been taken. Eric had said : " I am accused of theft and murder." He had said nothing more, and Edmond had been unable to question him. He remembered the face of the gentleman who had been present, and said to himself, that this person was probably connected with the *Préfecture de Police*. But he did not know his name ; and, moreover, the offices were not open at that hour of the night. Suddenly, however, he thought of Monsieur Piédouche, whom he suspected of being a police spy. At the Hippodrome, Eric had complained of seeing this fellow continually at his heels. Edmond also thought of the strange adventure, in which Piédouche had played so conspicuous a part, and asked himself if his friend's arrest was not his work. Young Chemazé belonged to a club where he rarely went, but he knew that Piédouche was there nearly every evening. It occurred to him that he might now find him there, and be able to question him respecting Eric Duroc, and even threaten to denounce him as a spy, if he refused to reply. It was a risk to run, as Piédouche might lose his temper, and make a scene ; but Edmond did not think of this.

The club was not far off, and when he reached it, the rooms were full, but he knew where to find the man he wanted. Indeed, Piédouche was looking on at a game of whist. " It is quite an event to see you here," said the so-called diplomatist as Edmond approached, " and a most agreeable surprise, as it always gives me pleasure to meet you."

" I came purposely to speak to you," answered Edmond, coldly.

" Ah ! Then speak at once, for I am down for this table, and shall be called in five minutes."

"I don't wish to be overheard, so pray come to that window there. I will not detain you long."

They approached the window, and then without any further preamble, Edmond exclaimed: "Eric Duroc has been arrested, and I wish to know why?"

"Why? And you ask me, but how can I tell you? I left you with him at the Hippodrome, and I know nothing of what took place after my departure."

"I am nevertheless convinced that you know it all perfectly well, for I am certain that it was you who caused his arrest."

"Do you consider me to be a policeman, then?"

"No; but I believe that you furnish information to the prefect of police."

"In other words, that I am a secret agent, a spy. I am half inclined to reply to you as you deserve, but your assertion is too extravagant to be noticed. I prefer to believe that you are not in your right mind, and beg permission to leave you. We will resume this conversation when you are calmer."

"No. You shall hear all I have to say. This evening, at the Hippodrome, you entered the box of that so-called baroness, with whom you were to have supped a week ago—you entered it merely to wait for Duroc's return. You of course knew where he had gone. A moment before he came back, a man who looked like a spy took up his position in the passage, and made some signs to you."

"Upon my word, I feel as if I were dreaming, and I have not one word to say in answer to you."

"I cannot force you to speak, but I warn you that if you don't give me satisfaction, I shall inform all my friends at the Bourse of what I have told you to-night, and also of what you begged Julien Fresnay and myself to conceal. I shall tell them of the discovery of the decapitated body, and when it is fully understood that you sent us away and remained alone with the police by the side of the corpse, I fancy that but little doubt will remain as to your calling."

Piédouche did not flinch or change colour under this withering attack; he simply replied: "I think, sir, that you would make a great mistake in stirring up a matter in which you were involved as well as myself, and if I can prevent your committing such an imprudence—one which you would very soon regret—I shall be only too glad to do so. What do you wish to know?"

"Where Duroc has been taken."

"To the Dépôt at the Préfecture, I presume, for such is generally the case under such circumstances."

"Well, to whom am I to apply for permission to see my friend?"

"You embarrass me. I am ignorant of the charge brought against Monsieur Duroc, or how the matter stands. But you can ask the public prosecutor for an order."

"Only to be refused, I presume. You, however, must know some of the chief officials."

"I might tell you that I don't. You deserve this reply, but as I

believe that you are merely excited by your friend's arrest, I will not show you any malice. Besides, I greatly liked M. Duroc, and if I can serve him I will gladly do so. There is a man of considerable importance at the Préfecture—whom I once knew very well. He can give you the information you desire, I fancy. Present yourself in my name: he will receive you. He calls himself Jolras, and you will find him at his office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very good," said Edmond. "I will ascertain how much your recommendation is worth. No one yet knows that Duroc is arrested. And I don't wish it to be known at all. I will explain his absence satisfactorily to his friends. I rely on your silence and warn you that if you speak I shall do the same."

As Edmond concluded, he turned his back on M. Piédouche, who quietly returned to the whist table. The detective had received this shower-bath without a change of countenance, but he had instantly measured the extent of his danger, and to avoid it had given the address of his superior at the Préfecture. "I have really risked nothing in doing so," he said to himself. "Jolras won't betray me, for he well knows that he will need me again. He will talk like a father to this youth, but not a word will he say about the Princess Yalta. The most important thing is to calm Chemazé. I shall remain away from the club for the present. It is not the place for Mr. Francis Disney, for people who know the prince might meet me here, and the descendant of the Crimean kings would show me to the door. I must make up my mind to give up whist until I have handed Jolras the real murderer of the headless woman."

While Piédouche thus consoled himself, Eric's friend reached his own dwelling, where he passed a sleepless night. At seven o'clock he was up, and at ten he reached the Préfecture de Police and asked for M. Jolras of the first sentinel he saw. "Follow the passage," answered the soldier, "and address yourself to the office-attendants."

Edmond did as he was instructed, and finally reached an ante-room, where three office-attendants were stationed. He addressed one of them, who, after looking at him from head to foot, vouchsafed the information that M. Jolras only received persons furnished with letters of introduction. "I haven't any," answered Edmond, "but I come from Monsieur Piédouche."

"Don't know him," answered the office-attendant carelessly.

"Monsieur Jolras knows him, however, and you will please repeat the name to him. If you refuse, you will regret it, as I shall write to your chief to let him know how you fulfil your duties."

This language had an excellent effect, for it was not that of a petitioner. The fellow disappeared and his two comrades condescended to rise. They began to look upon Edmond as a person of importance, while he was amazed to find that Piédouche's name had not opened the doors for him; however, a moment's reflection

furnished the explanation. Of course the so-called diplomatist did not show himself at the offices, his connection with the police being kept secret. However, the attendant soon returned, saying : "Monsieur Jolras will receive you, sir."

Edmond thereupon entered the next room and found himself face to face with a man whom he instantly recognised. It was the same person who had questioned Duroc at the Hippodrome, and who had seen him to the cab. He sat before a table covered with papers, and looked up at Edmond with questioning eyes. "To what do I owe the honour of your visit?" he asked, indicating a seat near the desk.

"You do not guess then?" said Eric's friend, as he sat down.

"Not the least in the world. You have made use of a name I know, and it may be you have a communication to make to me. But I have no time to lose. Will you kindly explain matters?"

"My name is Edmond de Chemazé. I am the friend and shall soon be the brother-in-law of Eric Duroc, who was arrested last night."

"Ah! I remember now. It was you who spoke to him outside the Hippodrome. But how is it you come from Monsieur Piédouche?"

"Well, he gave me your name and authorised me to use his. I forced him to do so by threatening to proclaim his connection with the secret police service."

"You are entirely mistaken sir; I know Monsieur Piédouche certainly, but—"

"No, I am not mistaken. I was mixed up in an affair which you know about—the finding of a woman's headless body near the river. And Monsieur Piédouche has spoken of me to you respecting that matter. Besides, I, last night, acquired the certainty that it was he who caused Monsieur Duroc's arrest."

M. Jolras could not hide his annoyance. His face darkened, and he broke a paper knife that he held in his hand. "Well, sir," he said, abruptly, "you came here, I presume, for some other purpose than to give me your opinion about a man whom I esteem and like. What do you desire?"

"I wish permission to see my friend."

"I have no power to give permission, and the public prosecutor will not decide in the case for three days, in accordance with the law."

"And do you imagine that we can remain for three days in this uncertainty, that I can leave a young girl, who will soon be my wife, weeping for her brother, without giving her any reasons for his arrest?"

"Monsieur Duroc knows the reasons."

"His family have a right to know them also, that they may be able to prove the absurdity of the charge. We are not in Russia, we are in France."

"It seems to me that before your friend entered the cab I heard him say—"

"That he was accused of theft and murder. Yes, but what has he stolen? Whom has he murdered? It was not, I presume, the woman whom Piédouche found in the sack last week."

M. Jolras started on hearing De Chemazé allude in this way to Piédouche's blunder. He wondered if this young man intended to sneer at the Paris police, which claimed to be the first in Europe. He had been, moreover, greatly disturbed by Duroc's arrest, and had asked himself if the young fellow had not told the truth when he said that he had merely taken the money for safe-keeping. As to the murder, that charge must be abandoned, as the princess was living. Under all the circumstances, therefore, M. Jolras was inclined to show a certain amount of cordiality to Duroc's friend. "Well, sir," he said, after a pause, "I know that you are an honourable man, and I fully understand the grief you must feel for your friend's misfortunes. I am sure he hasn't killed any one."

"But you believe that he has stolen," said Edmond bitterly. "That is worse still. A murderer is less contemptible than a thief. Duroc's honesty is proverbial at the Bourse."

"I know that. I know, too, that Monsieur Duroc has a fair friend whom he adores. This friend, whom I do not care to name, is very wealthy, and he managed her speculations. He took a small house in a deserted street near the Hippodrome, where he could meet her, and he went there last night. Not to meet her, however, for she had quarrelled with him and left Paris. Why did he go there? When questioned, he could not give any satisfactory reply; but a detective, who was on the watch, saw him."

"A detective! Is there any law against a man having an assignation with a woman?"

"No, no law, of course; but husbands have rights."

"Then it would be the—"

"Excuse me. I can only tell you that Duroc was seen to take a bundle of bank-notes—300,000 francs—from a secret drawer."

"If he took the notes it was because they belonged to him. And it was for this reason he was arrested?"

"Precisely. I was informed at once of the arrest, and questioned him, whereupon he admitted that the money belonged to the woman he knew, who had secreted it there. He did not once say that it belonged to himself. He even pretended that he did not know it was there, that he discovered it by accident, and took it to return to the person who deposited it."

"And you consider this explanation improbable?"

"Remember that this person, the owner of the money, had quarrelled with him. We have the proof of that in a letter found in his pocket-book; besides, she was travelling, and he had no idea where she was or when she would return."

"And you arrested him on such preposterous grounds as these? You have not even questioned the woman herself?"

"What could she tell us? Monsieur Duroc admits the facts. She would scarcely do more, or would she make any complaint

against him, for, if she did, the facts would all be known, and she is married, remember."

"But you cannot try Duroc without summoning this woman as a witness."

"I don't know what the public prosecutor will decide to do. I can only say that the matter concerns him."

"And in the meantime Duroc is in prison. If he is suffered to remain there, I swear that to-morrow all Paris shall know the reason, and the shame of this woman will be public talk."

"The fact is," murmured M. Jolras, "if she knew the danger that threatens both Duroc and her own reputation, she would, of course, interfere; it would then be very easy to dismiss the charge against your friend. She would only need to say, that she had told him to take this money to send it to her, or that she knew him to be incapable of appropriating it."

"Well, then, why don't you see her? Or if she is not in Paris, telegraph to her immediately."

"I have already told you, sir, that I myself can do nothing," and M. Jolras rose from his chair to signify that the interview was at an end. "Monsieur Duroc's friends must do the rest," he added.

Edmond bowed and departed. He understood that Eric's fate was in the hands of the Princess Yalta, who had done him such infinite harm. But where was she to be found? She no longer went to the Bourse for Eric, and the latter had let it be understood that she was travelling. Still she might have returned. In any case it was best to make inquiries at her house. As M. Jolras had indicated, she had but one word to say for Duroc to be set at liberty.

And much as Edmond disliked her, he resolved to entreat her to declare the truth. On leaving the prefecture he first repaired to the office, and told the broker that Eric was ill and would not be at the Bourse that day; in fact, that he might be detained at home by indisposition for several days, and that he, Chemazé, would in the meantime take his place. This arrangement was effected without any difficulty, and Edmond had the satisfaction of ascertaining that the disaster he was so anxious to conceal was not yet known to any one. Piédouche had said nothing, and it was probable that he would never open his lips. However, Edmond was obliged to attend the Bourse and to defer his visit to the Rue de Tilsitt for several hours. All went well; no one asked any questions, or seemed at all curious in regard to Duroc's sudden illness. M. Piédouche did not turn up, contrary to his usual habit, and at half past three Edmond was at last free. He walked towards the Rue de Tilsitt, reflecting over what had been said to him by M. Jolras. This had been quite enough to enable Edmond to prepare his batteries in case he were able to see the princess that day. Her letter dismissing Eric proved that she was absolutely heartless, and she certainly would not be moved by any representation concerning his position. An appeal must rather be made to her pride, by stating in plain terms that if Duroc were tried it would be at the

cost of her reputation. Edmond's great difficulty lay in his imperfect knowledge of the facts. This story of the bank-notes removed by Duroc from a secret drawer, made him very uneasy. He remembered that on that eventful Saturday Eric had taken the princess the same sum which he was accused of having stolen, and that he had brought back a receipt for it. By what strange chance had this money been found in the mysterious little house? Jolras had almost given Edmond to understand that the prince knew of the affair, but the young fellow did not believe that. Indeed, the prince's indifference as to the conduct of his wife was matter of public notoriety. If it were not the prince, then it was the police authorities who had had the house watched. But with what object? They could not have foreseen that Eric would commit a robbery there. Were they looking for the murderer of the decapitated woman, and in doing so had they accidentally caught a thief? Was there any connection between Eric's arrest and the story of the sack conveyed in a brougham driven by a Russian coachman? Edmond, totally without a clue to the mystery, lost himself in its many complications, and was in danger of making some great mistake. After long and serious reflection, he decided that if he were fortunate enough to see the princess, he would tell her just what he knew, and nothing more, await her replies and to be inspired by them.

When he reached the Rue de Tilsitt, he saw that the grand entrance gate of the house was open, and that the porter stood near the gate in the attitude of a soldier about to present arms to his sovereign leaving the palace. Edmond also saw a low open carriage in the courtyard, one which he instantly recognised as having been constantly driven by the princess, so he felt certain that she was at home. The superb horses were champng their bits impatiently, while at their heads stood a footman—a young fellow with a very insolent-looking face. "Has madame, the Princess Yalta returned?" asked Edmond, addressing the colossal porter.

This question had been carefully considered, and the porter said to himself, this gentleman knows the princess, as he is aware that she has been away. He therefore answered with great politeness: "She returned yesterday, but she is going out at once."

"So I see," Edmond quietly replied, "but if you will kindly send her this card, I think she will receive me before she goes out."

He had prepared this card, and under his own name he had written that of Eric Duroc. The porter, in compliance, was about to summon a footman, but at that moment the princess herself appeared on the house steps, ready to go out. Her pale face looked a little worn, but her eyes were as brilliant as ever, and they fell on Edmond conversing with the porter. She frowned, but made a sign to the porter, who instantly said to Chemazé:

"The princess calls you, sir."

Edmond did not wait to be urged, but hastened towards the steps. He removed his hat before he mounted them, and ap-

proached his enemy with the courtesy of a man of society. Before he could mention his name, however, she exclaimed: "You are Monsieur Edmond de Chemazé, are you?"

"How do you know me, madame?" he asked, in surprise.

"I have seen you at the Bourse, and one of your friends told me your name."

"I come from that same friend."

"What! From Monsieur Duroc? What does he want of me?" asked the princess, coldly.

"I will gladly tell you if you will grant me a few minutes' conversation. I see that you are going out, and I will not detain you long."

"Speak then."

"Not here—surely. I have things to tell you which you can't anticipate."

"And your friend did not dare to come himself! He did right, for he certainly would not have been received. But you flatter yourself that his ambassador will be heard?"

"I think you will regret it if you refuse to listen to me."

The princess looked at Edmond with so strange an expression that he felt uncomfortable. It seemed to him that she was examining him as she would have done a horse to see if he were worthy of the honour of belonging to her.

"So be it then," she said. "I consent to listen to you, but not here. I am going to drive in the Bois for an hour. Come with me, and we shall have ample time for conversation. I will bring you back here, and then you can return to Monsieur Duroc."

Edmond had foreseen everything except this invitation, which he could not accept. To enter the princess's carriage, to show himself with her in the Bois de Boulogne at an hour when all fashionable Paris was there, to make himself thus conspicuous, when in three weeks he meant to marry Laure, would be most disrespectful to his betrothed, and would expose both her and himself to the most insidious remarks.

"Excuse me madame," he said, coldly. "But that is quite impossible. Some one is waiting for me now."

"I understand," answered the princess disdainfully. "You are afraid of compromising yourself. Just as you choose, sir. It does not please me, however, to delay my drive to receive you."

"I will return later in the day."

"You need not trouble yourself to do so; my door will be closed to you. Tell the man who sends you, that there is nothing in common between us, and that I have quite forgotten his existence."

Edmond turned pale. He felt that if he turned away Eric would be ruined. For the Muscovite princess would never pardon the prisoner's friend the affront of refusing to accompany her. What did it matter, after all, if he were seen with her? He felt able to impose silence on slanderous tongues, and, besides, how could anything reach the ears of the pure young girl who lived such a life of

seclusion? "Pray, decide now," said the princess. "My horses are growing impatient, and I shall not swerve from what I have said. If you wish to speak to me, come. If you don't, let me go,"

Edmond now had a brief struggle with himself, and answered as courteously as possible: "I am at your service, madame."

"Very good," she said. "I do not like people to thwart my whims. Monsieur Duroc must have told you so. And you will see that you had better have me for a friend than an enemy."

This was plain speaking, but it was not the time to reply. Edmond followed the princess down the steps, and seated himself by her side in the carriage. She already had the reins in her hands, and the groom, after receiving from her an order in the Russian language, perched himself on a seat behind his mistress. No thoroughly trained coachman could have managed his horses better than the princess managed hers. This frail-looking woman had wrists of steel, and keener eyes than Piédouche himself possessed.

"You are Duroc's best friend," she said, abruptly.

"His best friend, and his future brother-in-law," answered Edmond, who remembered the look which the princess had given him when they stood upon the steps.

"Ah! Yes, you are to marry his sister, I believe," she said, with affected indifference. "She is pretty, her style is thoroughly French. Well, as you are so intimate with Monsieur Duroc, you, of course, know all there is to know about me and him."

"I only knew it when you had quarrelled," said Edmond.

"That was last Saturday. And it was on Saturday, at midnight, that he received his dismissal."

"I met him a moment later, just after he received it."

"Really! And how did he take it?"

"He was in despair. The poor fellow nearly died."

"But he didn't die, and he continues to hope that I will see him again. I presume that he has sent you to offer me his submission. I estimated him correctly. He has no blood in his veins!"

Edmond felt indignant, but he restrained himself, and said quietly: "It was not he who sent me. He does not even know that I have come to you to-day. I wish you to save him, for he was arrested last night."

"Arrested; and why?"

"He is accused of stealing three hundred thousand francs—which belong to you."

The princess started, and her two horses pranced, but she was prompt in curbing them, and in regaining her usual calmness. "Ah!" she said, "this is very curious. How did it happen?"

"This sum had, it seems, been forgotten by you in a house where you were in the habit of meeting Eric."

"I now understand why I couldn't find it. But how could any one know that Duroc had it? I never accused him."

"Ever since your departure the house has been watched."

"By whom?"

"That I cannot tell you, but detectives were concealed there and saw Eric take the bank-notes from a secret drawer. He was followed and arrested at the door of the Hippodrome."

"At what hour was your friend arrested?" asked the princess, now evidently disturbed.

"At eleven o'clock."

"It is very odd. What did he say to the men who arrested him?"

"He said that he had discovered the money by accident, and had taken it to give it to you, fearing that the house might be entered by burglars, and the money stolen."

"I shall never claim it. And he named me, did he?"

"No. He simply said that the money belonged to a lady."

"But all Paris will know, of course, that I am that lady."

"The police know it now, I fancy. But they did not learn it from Duroc, however. And it is precisely because they do know it that I come to you."

"I don't care who knows or who does not. I only wish to find out why the house was watched."

"I have no idea, and I think it very strange myself. But I have been so absorbed in the consequences of this affair that I have really thought of little else. You, as well as myself, must wish to have it stopped."

"And why, pray? As his future brother-in-law, Duroc's disgrace will reflect upon you, but I care nothing about it. I may be questioned, of course, but I shall give very simple answers. I shall say I know nothing about it at all."

"But if you deny all knowledge of the matter, you will be overwhelmed by evidence. If, on the contrary, you tell the truth, you will avoid figuring in a criminal trial, and you will save a man to whom you were once attached."

"Well, what am I to do to save him?"

"It is only necessary for you to tell the official who has charge of the affair, that you are sure Duroc intended to return the money to you. The accusation will at once fall to the ground, and you will not be obliged to appear as a witness in a criminal trial. Your name will not be printed in every newspaper in Europe."

"Which would not trouble me in the least, I assure you. But I should leave France rather than appear as a witness."

"And you don't care if an innocent man is convicted? Eric will be convicted if you don't come to his help. One word from you would save him and set him at liberty to-night."

The carriage had now reached the Bois, and was about to enter the Route de Longchamp. The princess was on the point of answering Edmond, when at this moment a victoria suddenly turned out of a side avenue. The princess pulled up her horses, and had need of all her presence of mind and of all her skill to avoid a collision. She succeeded in doing so, but some shrieks from the victoria testified to the terror of the two women who occupied it. No sooner was the danger over, however, than they turned with a

laugh to look at the princess and her companion. "You know these women, it seems," said Madame Yalta, coldly.

"I have seen them before," replied Edmond, who had recognised Lucy Travers and the Hungarian baroness.

"And I see them every day in the Bois. And they know me well. The mischief is done. You are fatally compromised."

Edmond was choking with rage. He knew very well that the story would be all over Paris within an hour's time, and he had begun to despair of being of the smallest use to his friend. "These women know of Duroc's intimacy with you," he said, coldly. "And since you will do nothing to help him, they will soon know as well that he is accused of murder and robbery."

"What!" exclaimed the princess, looking Edmond full in the eyes, "of murder, did you say?"

"Yes, madame," answered Edmond.

"That charge lacks common sense," rejoined the princess. "A man must have more energy than Duroc has to kill anyone. He is as mild as a lamb. Besides, he has no enemies. He might have thought of killing me when I let him understand that I never wished to see him again; but I am living, as you see."

"I do not know what murder he is accused of," said Edmond. "I do not know even if they have persisted in the accusation, for the man who arrested him yesterday, and whom I saw this morning, spoke only of the bank-notes."

"I did disappear, it is true, without saying where I was going. And the police in their meddlesome zeal may have taken it into their heads that Duroc had disposed of me. Upon my word it is very odd!"

"Really, madame," answered Edmond, who could contain himself no longer, "it is more than odd to see a man's honour and safety imperilled in consequence of an error that you can easily rectify. I rather think you enjoy the situation."

"How angry you are! Ah! one can see you have some ardour and energy! Duroc would never have become so excited in defending a friend! Well, well, I may perhaps decide to come to his assistance—that is when I fully understand the case."

"You know perfectly well that he is not a thief."

"Well, I had forgotten the bank-notes, which I myself had placed in a secret drawer. On returning to Paris, I remembered where I had left them, and went to fetch them, but they were no longer there. I should never have complained of their loss, be sure of that. But I certainly can't say with what motive your friend took possession of them."

"Do you mean that you doubt his honesty? That is a little too much, madame, and I—"

"Mean to leave me at once," interrupted the princess, laughing immoderately. "Take care! if you offer me such an insult in a public drive, I will avenge myself on your friend. I will leave him just where he is!"

"It would be an infamous thing to do. You have no heart!"

"More insults! Are you quite sure that I deserve them?"

"Prove me the contrary by doing what I ask."

"Are you sure that I am incapable of loving? Ah! don't speak to me of Eric. The man I could and would love must be a man who would only live for me, and who would forget everything to follow me. But Duroc forgot nothing and no one for my sake, neither his sister, his friends, nor his business. He remained plodding along in his broker's office, when he might have fled with me to the end of the world. And when he saw at last that I was weary of his rose-water affection, he made nightly pilgrimages to the house where we had been in the habit of meeting and moaned over his lost happiness."

"And you reproach him for doing so?"

"Yes, for he lacks spirit. If a man treated me as I have treated him, I should kill him."

"Suppose that I told you that he thought of killing you—that on Saturday night he waited for hours outside your house with his revolver in his hand. He intended to blow out your brains as you alighted from your carriage."

"Is that true? You make me like him a little. But he evidently calmed down quickly. Why, he ought to have set fire to the house where we used to meet. I should have done so."

"Have the goodness, madame," said Edmond, impatiently, "to tell me what I may expect from you? If you refuse to assist Duroc, I must go at once, as I have no time to waste. I must try and get him out of his difficulty without your assistance."

"No," replied the princess, gently; "not without my assistance. You plead his cause so well that I can but comply with your request."

"Then you will see the person at the Préfecture, this Monsieur Jolras, who only waits for your testimony to have my friend set at liberty."

"What sort of a man is this Monsieur Jolras—what is he like?"

"Oh! he is about fifty, of middle height, somewhat stout, with a full, closely-shaven face, and a parti-coloured rosette in his button-hole."

"Ah! indeed," murmured the princess, shaking her head.

"And what are his functions?"

"I don't know exactly. But I am sure that he holds an important position at the Préfecture."

"Very probably. But how did you know him? He surely doesn't go into society?"

Edmond slightly hesitated, and then said—"It was he who arrested Duroc, and escorted him to a cab. I was there. I asked the official's name of a policeman, and the next morning I went to his office."

"Very good. And now, tell me, was it he who took Duroc to prison last evening?"

"No, madame ; he went in an opposite direction, and I did not follow him."

"You made a great mistake then. You should have seen where he went. Shall we return now? The Bois is becoming too full. All the usual people are here, and I hate them."

Edmond had indeed been forced to raise his hat repeatedly to friends whose mocking smiles exasperated him. But no one had greeted the princess. A title and millions are not enough, in spite of what is said and written, to enable a foreigner to enter the charmed circle of the Faubourg St. Germain. Edmond was only too delighted to put an end to an exhibition that had humiliated him so deeply. "Return!" he said. "By all means. I did not venture to make the request, but you know why I came. May I venture to hope that you will at once take steps to have poor Duroc liberated."

"Well, if you will take tea with me to-night at ten o'clock, you shall learn all that I have done between now and then," said the princess, quietly.

Edmond understood her. She again bargained with him for Eric's liberty, and Edmond could not do otherwise than accept her conditions. "I will be there, madame," he said, bowing.

"Very good. You will have no reason to repent accepting my invitation. My tea is excellent, and I may have some good news for you. But I must make haste. In seven minutes we shall be in the Rue de Tilsitt."

As she spoke, the princess turned her horses through the crowd of vehicles, and drove quickly towards Paris. The drive now became a silent one. Edmond thought with regret of the engagement he had made for the evening. The princess was equally absorbed, for she did not say one word until her carriage entered her own courtyard. A man who was also entering it stepped quickly aside to avoid being driven over, and as he did so he raised his hat. Edmond unwittingly uttered an exclamation of surprise. He had recognised Piédouche, who seemed to fear recognition, for after the carriage had passed, he hastened towards the steps which led to the prince's private apartments. The princess, who had at once recognised this man as the one who had intruded upon her the previous evening, when she was examining the drawers of the Byzantine cabinet, stopped her horses, and summoned the porter. "Who is that gentleman?" she asked.

"An American, madame. His name is Francis Disney. He comes to play chess with His Highness Prince Yalta."

"Ah!" said the princess, and turning to Edmond, she asked—"When did you know this transatlantic gentleman?"

"He is not an American," he said, with a sudden impulse ; "he is a spy, and I suspect him of having caused Eric's arrest."

"And I am sure of it," answered the princess, coldly. "But I will attend to him. Many thanks, sir. I shall see you to-night."

Edmond bowed and went off. Piédouche was already in the hall.

V.

PIÉDOUCHE was received as usual by the prince, but he was not quite at his ease on account of his meeting with the princess and Edmond in the courtyard of the house. He was afraid that Chemazé might have revealed his identity to the Muscovite belle, and the idea was by no means a pleasant one. Entering the room where the prince was waiting, the detective took his seat at a table where the chessmen were already placed. The prince, who was dull and sleepy, watched his movements, but said nothing.

As yet the Muscovite had been unable to beat this champion of the United States; but the latter, afraid of discouraging his opponent, contrived to give him some little advantage from time to time, and even asked himself if it would not be advisable to lose a game very shortly, and thus anchor himself firmly in the good graces of the capricious Russian. "I am at your orders, prince," he said in his most insinuating tone, "and I have a presentiment that you will be the victor to-day. I retired very late last night, and so I am not quite up to the mark to-day."

"And I had no sleep at all," grumbled the prince, preparing an excuse for himself in case he should be defeated.

"May I venture to remind you before we begin that you are to present me to the princess?"

"Yes, when she returns to Paris."

"She has returned. I have just seen her in the courtyard. Your porter told me it was she. I felt sure of it, however, for no other woman could have so distinguished an air."

"You are better informed than myself. I was not aware of her arrival. I will ascertain." Thereupon the prince rang the bell and a valet entered the room. This valet was Dominique, solemn and dignified, as befits a servant in a stylish house. As he stood waiting for his master's orders, he contrived to give Piédouche a glance which signified, "There is some fish in our net."

"Go and inquire from me if the princess is at home," said the prince.

"Madame has just come in," answered Dominique.

"Then tell her that I wish to see her in an hour's time, and beg her to wait for me."

Dominique bowed most respectfully and left the room.

"I intend to pay my debt by introducing you," said the prince,

"but I warn you once more that after the introduction you must get out of the affair as best you can. I am not responsible for you, as I only know you as playing a good game of chess. Besides, I am on such terms with my wife that I can ask no favours from her. She does just as she pleases, so do I. Let us now see if your usual good luck will attend you. Yesterday I had the game in my hands, when an unfortunate interruption averted my attention and made me lose it."

"You will win this one," said Piédouche to himself, "and then I will turn my attention to your wife."

The combat began, and the prince was delighted to find that a combination of moves which he had previously tried with but little success was now doing well. If his head had been clearer, he would have seen that Piédouche purposely neglected the most obvious moves, but pride and brandy combined blinded him to such a degree that he believed his success to be solely due to the superiority of his play.

Piédouche resisted just enough to confirm his noble adversary in his delusion, and some twenty minutes later, the blacks were in a desperate position. The prince was breathless with hope and joy, his gray eyes glittered feverishly, and Piédouche, who watched him stealthily, was struck by the expression of his face. The Tartar had thrown off the mask of civilisation. "It is your move," sneered the prince at that moment, "what are you going to do now? I fancy that I have got you this time."

"I do not surrender yet," muttered the detective, and he moved a knight which could not prevent his defeat, although it retarded it.

"Good morning, Sacha," said a woman's voice at this moment. "You sent to say that you would like to see me. What do you wish?"

The prince looked up, while Piédouche turned, and started to his feet. The princess was behind him; he had not heard her enter the room on account of the thickness of the carpet. "I wish to present this gentleman," answered the prince in a mocking tone. "You may ask why? Well, it is to pay a wager that I have lost at chess."

"Who is this gentleman?" asked Nadège, cold and laughily as usual.

"He will tell you himself. I really don't know."

Piédouche was sorely humiliated, and not disposed to stomach the affront quietly. "Madame," he said, in his most dignified tone, "I am Sir Francis Disney of Baltimore."

"Baltimore is in the United States, so why do you call yourself a 'Sir?' There are no titles in your country. If you are really a 'Sir,' you are not an American."

Piédouche coloured furiously. He had forgotten this point, and by a slip of the tongue he had betrayed himself like the monkey in the fable. "I meant to say Mr. Francis Disney," he stammered. Then recovering himself, he added, "I solicited the honour of being presented to you, madame, because for some days past I have

been playing regularly with the prince, and I did not wish to be confounded with the salaried players, whose place I have taken for the time being—”

“If you have no other motive—”

“None whatever, madame ;” and Piédouche looked at Nadège in a way she understood. It was as much as to say : “Treat me well if you wish me to be silent in regard to our meeting last night.”

“Well,” she said, half smiling, “it is done ; you are presented.”

“But not as I hoped to be,” Piédouche boldly replied.

“You are at liberty to call upon me when your game is over if you choose.”

“Yes ; let us finish our game,” said the prince.

“If madame permits it,” murmured Piédouche, reseating himself. “We shall not be long, however. My defeat is near. I shall be checkmated in four moves. There is no escaping it.”

“Then, I have at last won one game ?”

“And will win many more, I fear.”

“No, this one suffices. I am satisfied with having beaten you once, and I will not detain you any longer, Sir Francis,” sneered the Muscovite, with especial emphasis on the “Sir.”

Piédouche understood. He was dismissed ; and this expulsion irritated more than it wounded him. Farewell to all his investigations if the house were to be closed to him. He had relied on assistance from the husband, and the husband turned against him. To his great surprise, however, the wife took his part. “Come with me,” she said. “I do not wish you to carry away a bad impression of our house. Sacha,” she added, addressing her husband, who was tossing down a glass of neat brandy, “one word with you before I take this gentleman away. What have you done with my maid, Xénia, during my absence ?”

At the name of Xénia, Piédouche pricked his ears like a war horse. The question seemed a very suspicious one to him.

“Xénia ?” said the prince, with a malicious smile, “you did not confide her to my keeping.”

“You have seen her since my departure,” answered the princess, imperiously. “That is certain. I forbade her entering your apartments, but no doubt you gave her contrary orders. Answer me, what have you done with her ?”

“Then you did not take her with you ?”

“No ; and I did very wrong to leave her at your mercy.”

“At my mercy, did you say ? I know that you cannot do without her, and I never thought of taking her from you, although, in reality, she belongs to me. She was born on my estates, where her father was a serf.”

“There are no serfs in Russia to-day ; besides, we are in France. Xénia is free, and you have no right to compel her to serve you contrary to her inclinations.”

“You force her to do whatever you please, and strike her when

you are displeased with her. I, however, have no reason to complain of her, and have always treated her well. She is a very pretty girl, and quite to my liking."

"Take care, Alexander Ivanovitch, I am not to be braved with impunity, and if you lay a finger on Xénia—"

"You will dismiss her! Very good, she would have no difficulty in finding another situation, and would gain by a change, for she is heartily weary of your ill-treatment. This I know, for she confided her sorrows to me."

"Ah! you have seen her then? You admit it?"

"No. She sometimes came to me to complain of your harshness; but the other day, when I sent for her, for I was greatly bored by everybody, Vladimir told me that she had gone away. I took it for granted that she was with you."

"You knew perfectly well that I went away alone. It was one of your coachmen who drove me to the station. You had taken mine, as well as my groom and my night brougham."

"That is not true."

"Stephane told me so this morning as an excuse for not being on hand when I needed him."

"He lied then. He was at a wine-shop undoubtedly. If I were in your place, I should investigate this matter."

"It is of no consequence. Where is Xénia? That is what I wish to know; and I am sure that you can tell me."

"I only know that I have not seen her. She is not here. She has probably run away with some fellow. Why not? There are very few women in Paris as pretty as she."

"Is this all you have to say, Alexander Ivanovitch?" said the princess, pale with anger. "Have you no other explanation to give me?"

"I haven't, indeed," answered the prince with a shrug of the shoulders. "Am I ever anxious to know where you go, and whom you see? I could easily have questioned Xénia, but I haven't done so, though I am sure that she could have told me, for I know you had no concealments from her."

"Very good. I know what to do now. Adieu."

"Adieu, Nadèje. Ask Monsieur Disney to give you some lessons in chess, it is a most soothing game."

During this stormy colloquy the spurious Yankee had stood a little aside, as is proper for a stranger during a domestic quarrel; but he had not lost one word of the conversation which had thrown him into a state of the greatest excitement. Light had come at last. And now he felt certain that the decapitated body was Xénia's. By whom had she been murdered? By Stephane and Vacili, of course; but probably by the orders of Prince Yalta, who, not daring to attack the princess, had avenged himself on her confidante and assistant. This drunken despot was quite capable of disposing of the life of a poor girl whom he looked upon as his slave under the pretext that she had come into the

world prior to the imperial ukase which freed the serfs. The princess made Piédouche a sign to follow her as she swept out of the gallery, and after saluting the prince respectfully, he went away with Her Highness. They passed through a long suite of magnificent reception rooms, and then entered the princess's private apartments, which, in their aspect, reminded Piédouche of the house where Duroc had been in the habit of meeting her. There were divans scattered all about, and any number of Byzantine curiosities such as are rarely seen in Paris. The princess pointed to a low seat, and then threw herself on a pile of embroidered cushions, lighted a cigarette, and said abruptly, "This is not the first time we have met."

"Yes," stammered Piédouche, taken somewhat aback by the remark. "You were entering the courtyard in an open carriage just as I crossed it."

"I was not speaking of that. You saw me last night. You entered a house where I was, and I neither know how nor why—"

"Ah! yes, I remember. But I told you my purpose then and there. I have come from America, and taken rooms temporarily at Meurice's. As I propose spending two or three years in Paris, I thought of renting a house in the Champs Elysées quarter, where many of my friends reside. One was described to me, and I at once went to the landlord, who offered to show it to me."

"Between eleven o'clock and midnight—a most singular hour, particularly as he knew perfectly well that this house was still occupied. And did he tell you who had hired it?"

"I did not ask him. I supposed it—"

"Pshaw! You did not know me. But now that you know who I am, do you think I hired that house?"

"Why shouldn't I think so?"

"Very good. And why do you imagine I did so?"

"That is a question that I have not ventured to ask myself. Do me the honour, madame, to look upon me as a gentleman; I should not be likely to pry into a woman's secrets. It isn't customary in the United States."

"Come, that won't do," replied the princess. "I do not know your real name, but I am sure it isn't Disney, and equally sure that you are a Frenchman."

"Good!" said Piédouche to himself, "that fool Chemazé has denounced me. I will pay him for it." And he answered aloud: "May I venture to ask, princess, on what you found that statement?"

"Upon the testimony of a man who knows you perfectly well, and whom you saw with me an hour ago in my carriage. His name is Edmond de Chemazé, and he is the intimate friend of Eric Duroc, with whom I was well acquainted, as you are aware, and who was arrested last night. Chemazé also says that it was you who caused his friend's arrest," continued the princess, looking her companion full in the face, "and I also accuse you of it. Now, justify yourself, if you can."

"How can you believe such absurd slander, princess? Perhaps, you believe me to be a detective!"

"I know you to be one. I will tell you who was with you last night. He was a person named Jolras. He holds a high position at the Préfecture of Police, and it was he who sent Duroc to prison. You see that I am well informed. Now, will you persist in saying that you are a citizen of the United States?" Piédouche did not speak. "Shall I also tell you," continued the Princess Yalta, "why Duroc was arrested? Well, one of your spies saw him take from a drawer some three hundred thousand francs which belonged to me. Am I not correct?"

"Excuse me, princess," said Piédouche; "but how does it happen, if you believe me to be an agent of the police, that you have brought me here instead of exposing me to Prince Yalta, who would have summarily dismissed me from his presence? I am certain you would not be so cordial to a man whom you believed to be a spy."

"I brought you here so that I might question you as to why the agent who surprised Monsieur Duroc was in the house. What possible interest could the police have had in watching a house where I met Duroc? Did they suspect us of manufacturing bank-notes there?"

"I think not."

"Or of murdering people?"

"Perhaps," hesitatingly answered Piédouche, who thought that the time had come to unmask his batteries.

"At last you consent to tell the truth. Then the authorities believed that a murder had been committed there. That is just what I thought, and I feel sure that Duroc was accused of killing me! Your police are very stupid, it strikes me."

"Any police may be mistaken, princess. Your absence was probably the cause of the mistake."

"Then, it is only necessary for a woman to go away without saying where she is going, for—"

"Oh! there were other matters of course."

"But now that I am here, the value of such ridiculous suppositions must be very clear."

"At all events, princess, *you* were not murdered."

"Then, why did you introduce yourself to my husband under a feigned name and in the character of a great chess-player? You will say that you did that before my return. But why did you call again to-day after ascertaining last night, as you did, that I was in the best possible health? Is it because you suspect *him* of having killed anyone?"

Piédouche really did suspect that such was the case. He said to himself, "Yalta knows all that his wife does, and he only tolerates her conduct because he cannot do otherwise. She is ten times as rich as he is, and if he divorced, he would be the loser. But he resolved to give her a lesson and to arouse her fears by wreaking

his vengeance on the poor serving-woman who was her tool in all her love affairs. He resolved to suppress this woman, and he has done so with really Muscovite refinement of cruelty. He had her carried away from here as soon as the princess had departed ; and he had her executed in the house which she had so often visited, with commissions from her mistress, just as the condemned are often executed upon the scene of their crime. That nothing should be lacking in this parody of an execution, they decapitated her. It would have been much simpler to hang her, but the prince did not wish the body to be recognized. The head is concealed somewhere in this house, and I don't despair of finding it. The question now is to know just how far the princess means to go, for she knows very well what she is about."

"Well ! why do you not speak ?" she asked, suddenly. "Will you explain what motive you had in trying to obtain a footing in this house, and why you were so disturbed when you were dismissed by my husband ? No protestations, pray. I know that you belong to the police, and I care nothing for that. I have no prejudices, and if you will give me the information I ask I will reward you handsomely. My waiting-maid has disappeared. Do you think she has been murdered ?"

"I think that if any one has been murdered it was probably she."

"Upon my word that is a most non-committal reply ; but I want something more distinct. You know that I was in the habit of meeting Duroc at a house near the Avenue Montaigne, and that on Saturday night I did not return home. From these facts you jumped to the conclusion that Duroc had murdered me. Yesterday I returned to Paris after a week's absence, and Xénia, whom I left here, is not to be found, nor has she been seen since that same Saturday night. I questioned my husband in your presence, and you heard how he answered me."

"He may have divined the truth. It is said that your maid was very pretty, and in Paris a pretty woman is exposed to many temptations."

"Xénia could not be tempted. The prince himself offered her mountains of gold. He even vainly proposed to marry her. The Russian law permits divorce, but she never consented."

"Then it may be that, to punish her for her refusal, the prince had her murdered. Prove that to me, and I will have her avenged."

"I cannot prove it, nor do I believe it. I simply have my suspicions."

"Well, if you would condescend to enlighten me in regard to the circumstances of the girl's disappearance, I might—"

"This is all I know : Last Saturday, after the Bourse, Monsieur Duroc came to bring me some money from my broker, and not having time to see my major-domo, and give him this money, I placed it in a bag that I usually wear at my waist. I went to dine with Duroc at Asnières. After dinner we returned to Paris, and at about nine o'clock we entered the house I have spoken of. My

carriage and my servants awaited me at the corner of the Rue Marbœuf."

"Duroc told Monsieur Jolras that you dropped him at the door."

"He told a falsehood, then. I went in with him and took the money from my bag, for the size of the package made it annoying, and placed it in the secret drawer where he subsequently found it. He was in the dressing-room at the time, and I don't think he knew what I did, so that he spoke the truth when he said that he had discovered the notes by accident. Ten minutes later a violent quarrel broke out between us, which was not an unusual occurrence, and always for the same reason. He refused to go to Russia where I wished him to accompany me. I left the house in a rage, forgetting the three hundred thousand francs, and swearing I would never see him again. I came here, and wrote a letter to that effect. This letter I gave to Xénia with orders to take it the next day."

"Duroc received it. It was in his breast-pocket when he was arrested."

"Xénia took it to him then, as I bid her, or it was taken from her and posted. I don't know which, but I do know that Xénia was in my bedroom that night, that she packed my travelling-bag, and that I left her at home."

"You left that same night, then?"

"Yes. I took the train for Havre at half-past twelve. I did not wish to wait until the next day. I was driven to the station by my husband's coachman. My own coachman and my footman were not to be found when I wanted them."

"That is just what I wished to know," thought Piédouche.

"Xénia begged of me to take her with me," resumed the princess, "but I did not listen to her entreaties, which I bitterly regret, for God only knows what has become of her!"

"But on your return you closely questioned your people, your door-porter among others?"

"My people know nothing. Xénia was in the habit of going out by a private door of which she had the key—a door communicating direct with the Rue de Tilsitt."

"Will you permit me to ask you, princess," said Piédouche, "what was your first idea on learning of this strange disappearance?"

"I shall tell you nothing of the kind," answered the princess, in some irritation. "It is you who owe me explanations, and I await them."

"She does not wish to denounce her husband," thought Piédouche. "After all, that is natural enough. Shall I now tell her all I know, or only a portion of it? Why not, after all? It might induce her to speak more freely."

"Have your police any knowledge of any murder having been committed in Paris within the last week?" said Nadège.

"Yes, madame, they know that a murder took place in the house

rented by Eric Duroc, for the place was searched, and in the bath-house traces of blood were discovered, although the tiles had been washed. The victim was gagged and garroted upon a chair of which very little remained. The straw seat had been torn away, and the wood scraped to remove the stains of blood ; and I have acquired almost the certainty that the unfortunate victim was decapitated—probably with a sword."

"How horrible !" murmured the princess, who had turned ghastly pale. "There is one thing, however, that I cannot make out," she continued ; "I do not understand why the police first took it into their heads to visit that house."

"Your intimacy with Duroc was known, and also that you met at that place ; and then your unexplained absence—"

"That can't be all. There must have been some other reason."

Piédouche hesitated for a moment, and then decided to go a little further. "You are right. A story told by some women at a supper was repeated to a commissary of police."

"Some women, you say ?"

"Yes, madame ; a Hungarian woman recently arrived in Paris, and known as the Baroness de Lugos, and a friend of hers, an actress, named Lucy Travers. On Saturday night, or rather Sunday morning, at about three o'clock, as they were going to take supper at a restaurant in the Champs Elysées, they saw near the Palais d'Industrie a brougham, with horses which they declared to be of Russian breed, and driven by a bearded coachman, like the coachmen in Russia. From this brougham a man, dressed like a charcoal-dealer, alighted with a huge sack which he lifted upon his shoulders."

"What a ridiculous tale ! Those women invented it."

"They swore to its truth. They assert that the man staggering under the weight of the sack took his way to the Seine."

"And you at once concluded that a dead body was to be thrown into the river. It is a pity that this body can't be found."

"Oh ! there is more to tell. The man who carried the sack abandoned it on the river bank, near the Pont des Invalides. He had been met on the quay by three gentlemen who were curious to know what was in the sack. They went towards him to ask. He seemed terrified, and fled, followed by these gentlemen, from whom he escaped by leaping into the river."

"And the sack—did the gentlemen open it ?"

"Yes, princess, and inside it they found the body of a young woman bound round with lead."

"How horrible !" cried the princess, in great agitation. "But of course it was easy to tell who she was. Some one must have recognised her."

"No, madame ; no one recognised her, for the body was headless. However, it has been embalmed, and if the head is ever found, the identity may be established. But I begin to believe that this head has been destroyed—burned perhaps."

The princess threw down her cigarette and rose from her cushions. This compelled Piédouche to do the same, although he hoped that the interview was not yet over. He wished to lead the princess on to accuse her husband in so many words. "You have told me a horrible story," she said, "but you have not yet replied to my question. How did this melancholy discovery suggest to the police the idea of visiting the house taken by Eric Duroc?"

Piédouche had gone too far to retreat. There was nothing for him to do now but to proceed. "Princess," he said, "upon the body there were innumerable punctures, showing that morphine had been administered."

"And what of that?" cried the princess. "Why should it be supposed—ah! I see," and she laughed nervously. "It is apparently known that I am in the habit of taking morphine in that way to soothe the neuralgia from which I suffer so horribly, and the authorities jumped to the conclusion that the body must be that of the Princess Yalta!"

"The punctures," answered Piédouche, "were only one indication. The brougham, the Russian horses, and bearded coachman another. Inquiries were instituted, and it was learned that a great lady was missing—a foreigner, who in her own country was known as the Princess Morphine—excuse my frankness; you asked for the truth—"

"Precisely. Go on."

"Well, your intimacy with Duroc was no secret. Cautious inquiries were made at your house. It was ascertained that you had not been seen since that Saturday. Your servants said you were travelling, but it was believed that some misfortune had happened to you."

"I understand. Go on about the house. Why did the police suppose that the murder was committed there?"

"Duroc was accused from the beginning, which was natural enough. He was known to be jealous, and crimes inspired by jealousy are not uncommon. It was supposed that you had had a violent quarrel that night, as you say was really the case. Now, the place where you and Duroc were in the habit of meeting was easily found by the police. Three days after the murder a detective visited it, and found some traces of blood. He immediately ordered a strict surveillance, and it came to pass that Duroc was seen pocketing the money."

"You were the detective, were you not—the story of the man, the sack, and the brougham, was told to you?" Piédouche nodded assent. "And it was you, also, who chased the man on the quay, and who opened the sack—"

"It was I, but I was not alone. I interfered in the affair by the purest accident." And Piédouche thereupon related the adventure that had befallen him that Saturday night, winding up by mentioning Edmond de Chemazé's interference in the matter of Duroc's arrest. "I sent him," added the detective, "to one of the authori-

ties at the Préfecture, a Monsieur Jolras, who, I presume, advised him to come to you. Jolras wants Duroc to be set at liberty, and I shall not oppose it, for, since I have had the honour of seeing you, I have discovered that he is innocent, even of the robbery."

This speech was well planned. Piédouche was anxious to know what the princess thought of Duroc's guilt; but she abstained from expressing any opinion.

"Then it is owing to you that the public have not enjoyed this last new scandal of the decapitated woman?" As she spoke, the princess looked with some graciousness at the self-styled diplomatist.

"Yes, madame, it was owing to me alone. I flatter myself that I have managed the matter with an unusual amount of prudence. I felt that publicity would be prejudicial to persons in as high a position as the Prince and the Princess Yalta. I rejoice still more that I did this now that we find we were on the wrong scent. The arrest of Monsieur Duroc can easily be remedied."

"You have not questioned my servants yet?"

"Not yet. I had especial reasons for not doing so."

"I divine your reasons. You think that they assisted the murderer?"

"That is my idea. I therefore wished to watch them."

"And to do so, you contrived to make the acquaintance of the prince, who has shown you the door. What will you do now?"

Piédouche shook his head, and his face clouded. "I can only continue to observe, that is all. However, I hope you will give me some hints, that will enable me to discover the rascals who murdered your maid. Will you allow me to ask if she was in the habit of using morphine?"

"I really don't know. It is quite possible, for she was very nervous. The instrument I used and the drug were at her disposal. But if she ever used it, she kept it a secret from me."

"Of course you would be able to recognise her body, princess," said Piédouche. "It has been embalmed; and if you—"

"I!" cried the Russian lady. "You must be mad! Do you think for a moment that I could look upon such a terrible sight? Besides, you cannot show me Xénia's face."

"The feet and hands of the corpse are admirably cared for, and, I should say, they could be easily identified by their beauty and delicacy—besides, there are two tiny moles on the left shoulder. I understand your repugnance, however, madame, and I don't insist. In the first place, I am now positive that the body is Xénia's. Others than you, princess, will recognise her when necessary; we can wait. Next, I believe that Xénia was murdered by some of your servants. They were jealous of the preference you showed her, or it may be that one of them was in love with her, and she did not respond to his affection. He knew that she often went alone to the little house. You had bidden her take a letter there; that night she was followed and surprised. All was prepared—every detail arranged. It is possible that the murderers believed

that she had about her the money you forgot in the secret drawer."

"I have been in the habit of intrusting large sums to her, to be sure. Then you think that my people— Ah! I remember that my coachman and footman were not there when I wanted them to take me to the station."

"And your coachman told you this morning that the prince had sent for him at about midnight, I believe. The crime was committed a little later. It is true the prince says that the coachman lies."

"The prince! Then you mean to say that—No, no—it is impossible—he did not like poor Xénia, but he would not have dared—"

"You imply something that I could not venture to put into words. Your husband is above suspicion, as you are yourself, and I do not dream of accusing him. In any event it would be premature. The future will clear up all our doubts."

"If he did do it," said the princess, speaking to herself, "if he really did, I will never try to save him from the punishment he so richly deserves—"

"Every movement of the servants under suspicion will be watched. Every word they speak will be heard and weighed."

"And if they admit that they were paid by my husband to murder Xénia—"

"Why then, madame, the prince would be arrested. Before the law of France all men are equal."

"Very good. Now promise me that you will do nothing without warning me, and in return I will give you my promise not to tell the prince what you have just said to me."

"Agreed, madame."

"Then, sir, I will detain you no longer," said the princess, dismissing Piédouche with a royal gesture.

The detective left the house much better pleased with himself than he had been when he entered it. "Yes, it is all clear enough," he reflected, as he strode down the Champs Elysées. "And if the people at the Préfecture are not pleased, they will be extremely exacting. Never was a blunder more completely or more brilliantly repaired. The prince employed Vacili and Stephane to murder his wife's favourite—this is as clear as possible. We shall have a most exciting case, provided, of course, that the Russian Ambassador does not interfere. But no, these Yaltas are not favourably looked upon in their own country. So the Russian government will let them get out of their trouble as best they can. Nor will the princess shrink from any scandal. I know women well and understand them, and I wager my right hand that she will see her husband guillotined without a word. But I must see Johras. Stephane and Vacili ought to be arrested at once. They will confess, and then will come the prince's turn. As for Duroc, I must advise Johras to let him go, if only to get rid of Chemazé, who is always at my heels." On reaching this point, Piédouche hailed a passing cab and drove to the Préfecture of Police.

VI.

EDMOND, on leaving the princess, had gone at once to see Laure, whom he found waiting for him in tears. What should he say to her? He hardly knew. He tried to soothe her, but she interrupted him. "Where have you been?" she asked.

The question was embarrassing, and Edmond did not attempt to answer it truthfully. "Excuse me for being so late," he replied, "I took Eric's place at the Bourse to-day, and was detained in the office afterwards."

"You, too, deceive me," murmured the young girl.

"I swear to you, that since yesterday I have been entirely occupied with Eric's interests," said the young lover somewhat surprised by the turn the conversation had taken.

"You have come from the Bois de Boulogne," exclaimed Laure, "you have been driving about with a woman."

"How did you know that?" asked Edmond, utterly confounded.

"Read this," she answered, handing him a strip of paper.

He took it and saw that it was a leaf torn from a pocket note-book; it had been folded in a small square, after the following words had been written upon it in pencil:—"Warn your brother that your lover has stolen his princess. At this precise moment she is driving Chemazé round the lake."

"How outrageous!" cried Edmond. "I divine who did this dastardly act."

"The note was handed to the doorkeeper here by the driver of a carriage occupied by two ladies—"

"The same who sat in the box next to you last night at the Hippodrome. They have never forgiven Eric and me for deserting them on the night of a little supper to which Julien Fresnay dragged us, and they have taken their revenge in this way. I met them just now in the Bois de Boulogne. I was with a foreigner to whom Eric has been devoted for a long time past. But you don't suspect me of having been interested in her, I trust? I will tell you why I was with her. I went to see her about Eric, and I found her just entering her carriage. She wouldn't listen to me unless I went with her."

"You went to see her about Eric? She has not taken him away with her, then, as you said yesterday! Where is he?"

"He has been arrested through a stupid mistake. That man who spoke to him was a police official. It was he who took him away."

"In prison! My brother in prison!" And the girl burst into passionate weeping. "Of what is he accused?" she gasped.

"Of the most preposterous crimes—too absurd to mention. They accuse him in the first place of murdering a woman whom he never saw, and of having stolen—"

"And you concealed this from me?"

"I hoped that he would be set at liberty this morning, and that you would never need to know this sad story. But I give you my solemn word that the error has been recognized, and he is to be released; however, there are certain formalities to be gone through."

"Formalities, when mere justice is to be done to an innocent man!"

"The officials await the testimony of the person whom he was supposed to have robbed."

"And this person is—"

"The woman who has bewitched him, and who has brought so much suffering upon us. She has promised me that she will testify that your brother is incapable of appropriating a sum of money which she left through forgetfulness in a house where they were in the habit of meeting."

"And you believe in her promise? Do you forget what she has done? Has she not weaned him from his friends, and driven him nearly mad? That woman has no heart."

"I don't rely on her heart. But it is to her interest to save him. If there were any publicity she would be ruined, for she is a married woman."

"I know who she is. It is the Russian princess, who called for him regularly at the Bourse. One day, when I went there for Eric, I saw him drive away with her. If she consents to testify to his innocence, it is only to strengthen her hold on him and torture him still further."

"No; she loves him no longer. But I threatened her and she yielded to my threats."

"Or feigned to yield, merely to have the pleasure of compromising you as well. She succeeded only too well, since those women saw and recognised you," said Laure, bitterly. "This last sorrow is more than I can bear! Swear to me," she continued, with feverish haste; "swear that you will never see her again!"

"Not even to save Eric?" asked Edmond, with heightened colour.

"Then she has imposed certain conditions upon you?"

"She told me to return to learn the result of the steps she was about to take. She was to go at once to see the man who has the power of releasing your brother."

"And—you will return to see her?"

"Yes; unless you forbid me."

"You are master of your own actions. But I wish to know

everything. Who was it that my brother was suspected of having murdered?"

"I believe that it was the princess herself. She had left Paris suddenly, and no one knew where she was. She reappeared, however, and of course the accusation faded into smoke."

"Do you mean that the mere disappearance of the princess caused this terrible charge?"

"Not altogether. A woman's body was recently found on the bank of the Seine, and the police believed the body to be the princess's."

"But how could they make any mistake? All Paris knows her."

"Excuse me for entering into these horrible details; but the woman's body was bare, and her head was wanting."

"It is very strange," murmured the young girl, passing her hand over her brow, as if to recall some fleeting recollection.

"What does it matter, after all?" continued Edmond. "This story has nothing to do with us. I, this morning, saw the detective who arrested Eric, and he told me that the accusation was ridiculous. It was he who advised me to go and see the Princess Yalta."

"Ah! very good. When shall I see you again?" said Laure, whose manner had suddenly changed.

"You send me away?"

"I wish to be alone. Return with Eric. No matter at what hour you come, you will find me, providing you bring him. And God grant that it may be to-night!"

This was a positive dismissal for Edmond, who was in no position to dispute it. He had done wrong by showing himself with the princess so publicly. And to win Laure's pardon for his error, he must rescue Eric from the clutches of the police. Laure had plainly implied this. She authorised Edmond to return to the princess, who could with a word save Eric, and spare herself a cruel humiliation. "I ask only twenty-four hours now," said Edmond, to Laure. "And I beg of you to believe that if I have offended you, I regret it extremely. I could in no way foresee that this woman would compel me to enter her carriage."

"Don't justify yourself," answered the girl, quietly. "I doubt neither your friendship for my brother, nor your love for me. I only wish that you would not be too hopeful. I, also, shall act, and I assure you that we shall both have to work to liberate Eric."

Edmond tried to say something in reply, but she silenced him with a gesture, and he departed without another word. Several hours must elapse before he saw the princess again. He had time to make his toilet and dine at a restaurant. He lived in the Rue Saint-George, in some modest rooms, and kept one servant, an old woman whom he had brought from the province where he was born and where he still owned some property. Having decided to go home, he was about to leave the house where Eric and Laure resided, when to his great astonishment, he saw before the door a superb landau drawn by a pair of fine horses, and driven by a coach-

man in dazzling livery. Two footmen as superb as the coachman were already standing on the footway, while their master, buried among some cushions, was conversing with the house-porter, summoned probably by one of the lackeys. This equipage created a great sensation in the street, and a small crowd was rapidly gathering to admire it.

"I have the honour to repeat to you, sir," said the doorkeeper, cap in hand, "that Monsieur Duroc is not at home."

"That is of no consequence," replied the occupant of the carriage, "I must speak to him, and wish him to be found at once."

"I would do my best to find him, sir; but I have not seen him for two days, and have no idea where he is. This gentleman, however, is his friend," added the doorkeeper, designating Edmond, who, on hearing the name of Duroc, had stopped short in surprise.

"Here! Come here!" cried the gentleman among the cushions, in a most imperative tone.

Edmond, red with indignation, quickly advanced, and exclaimed: "For whom do you take me, may I ask?"

"For a friend of one Duroc."

"That is a most insolent manner of speaking. My name is Edmond de Chemazé, and I never tolerate impertinence from any one."

The gentleman in the carriage made no reply, but drew a paper from his pocket, looked at it, and said: "Edmond de Chemazé, Rue Saint-George, No. 43. That is your number, is it not?"

"What is that to you?"

"Keep your temper, and get into this carriage, for I intended to call upon you if I did not find your friend. Come, get into my carriage. I wish to talk to you upon matters of importance."

"I do not talk to strangers."

"You are right. You don't know me, but you certainly know my name. I am Prince Yalta."

A thunderbolt falling at Edmond's feet could not have astonished him more than this simple announcement. How did the prince know Eric's and his address? What could he possibly want of them? Should he, Edmond, accept or decline this strange invitation? He was still hesitating when the prince exclaimed: "I wish to talk to you about my wife, and I would take you to my house, only my wife's people would see you, and would tell her. At your rooms we shouldn't be interrupted. So pray get in, my dear fellow." This "my dear fellow," irritated Edmond, who was unaccustomed to such familiarities, and as he still hesitated the prince continued: "I have no designs against you, I assure you. I only feel a kindly interest in you, as you will admit when you have heard what I have to say."

Edmond now yielded. One of the footmen opened the door, and the young fellow took his seat beside the prince without uttering a syllable. The carriage at once drove off. The footman had received Edmond's address and had probably given it to the coach-

man. Just as the landau turned into the Rue de Provence, a close carriage passed by and Edmond fancied that he caught a glimpse through the glass of two people he knew, Piédouche and Jolras. Meanwhile, the prince was smoking a huge cigar, and watching the smoke that ascended skyward. When the carriage eventually stopped in the Rue St. Georges, Edmond led the way upstairs to his apartments, offered the prince an arm-chair, and seated himself opposite to him without once opening his lips. "It is very comfortable here," said the prince, looking round him; "upon my word, I believe I see some works of art. However, never mind, I came here to talk of my wife, as I have just told you. You were driving about with her to-day?"

Was this Russian jealous, after all? "Who told you that?" asked Edmond coldly.

"People who saw you together, and who took the trouble to tell me. They wrote to me giving your address, and that of your friend Eric Duroc."

Edmond understood now. The two women whom he had seen in the Bois de Boulogne had evidently written both to the prince and to Laure. He had of course no idea what Yalta had been told; but complete frankness was now his best policy undoubtedly. "There is no reason why I should conceal the fact that I drove to the Bois de Boulogne with the Princess Yalta," he said. "I went to call upon her, but she was just going out in her carriage and—"

"Oh! you need make no apologies. Nadèje is at liberty to drive whomsoever she pleases. I ask no explanations, neither do I require any, except on one point. I preferred to apply to your friend Duroc, but, as you saw, I could not find him. Moreover, first of all, I wish to reassure you completely in regard to my intentions," continued the prince, with perfect calmness. "You probably imagine that I have come here to quarrel with you?"

Edmond made a sign of denial, whereupon the prince continued—"No, that is not my intention, for I consider myself your debtor; but before explaining in what way I propose to prove my gratitude to you, I desire to ask one question, to which I beg you to reply frankly, Which of you two, you or Eric Duroc, is at present in the Princess Yalta's good graces?"

This question indicated the most complete cynicism, or concealed a snare. Edmond, in doubt, therefore replied, "You are laughing at me. If you came here merely to mystify me, I assure you that I shall not submit to it."

"I understand your scruples," answered the prince, calmly, "they are those of any man of honour. But I will place you at your ease. I am perfectly well aware of the terms on which this Duroc and my wife have been for several months. Why shouldn't I know what all Paris knows? She took delight in making herself conspicuous with him, and now she drives about with you. You think me cynical, eh? But pray don't judge me without knowing me. I am not a Frenchman, and I do not govern myself according to

the code of civilised life. I am a savage of a royal race. The Czar, whose ancestors despoiled mine, married me when I was but twenty to one of his wealthy subjects—my wishes were never consulted—and restored to me a small portion of my property on condition that I married a woman I had never seen. I should have refused had I known what she was. I found her out after awhile, and settled my relations with her. It was agreed between us that we should leave Russia, and that she should lead her own life and allow me the same liberty. She has used and abused the freedom I granted her, and has annulled the compact we made. She came to see me to-day, and made a scene apropos of a girl whom she likes—a maid of hers. She accuses me of abduction. I received her, however, as she deserved. But this is not enough. I now intend to be separated from her entirely.”

“Your quarrels don’t concern me,” interrupted Edmond, “and I don’t understand why you tell me about them.”

“It may be that I am mistaken in saying this to you. Perhaps I ought to have addressed myself to Duroc. However, hear me out. I have resolved on asking for a divorce, and I shall certainly obtain one. I hope, moreover, that I shall obtain it in such a way that my wife will be deprived of the right of managing her own fortune, and receiving her entire income. Her conduct has been such that the Russian courts will grant me compensation. But I have some pity for this mad woman, and I offer her one way of avoiding ruin. She may go away after giving me a promise in writing not to return to Russia or to France, and I in my turn will promise not to molest her. She may live in America, Turkey, or India. I do not care where, providing I never hear of her. Indeed I will never see her again. I will never even write to her, or read any letters that she may write to me. All is over between her and me, and I require her to leave the house within twenty-four hours. Now I know her well, and I know that she will never go away alone. She needs some one to torture. I thought this some one was Eric Duroc until I received the letter, which informed me that you had replaced him in her good graces. Nevertheless, I first went to your friend and accidentally met you at his door. I therefore explain the situation to you. You will notify him, or act without him as you please. I wish, also, that the princess may be at once apprised of my resolution. You will advise her to obey me, and you will add that if she refuses she will bitterly repent of her obstinacy. You may even add that I shall not lift my little finger to prevent your sharing her gilded exile.”

“Enough, sir!” said Edmond, rising. “You insult me, and I will not allow you to continue doing so. Leave my rooms; and my seconds shall call upon you within an hour.”

“You can spare yourself the trouble of sending them, as I shall not receive them,” answered the prince, carelessly. “And as you see fit to assume this tone, I shall go away. However, remember what I say. If any harm comes to Nadeje, you will be to blame,

the nail of the little finger of her right hand is still pink with henné. It is an Eastern custom, uncommon in France. If there were only this peculiarity, it would serve to identify Xénia; she clung to the custom. Oh! I am sure it is she."

"That suffices. Will you follow me to the clerk's office?"

The prince made no objection, and Jolras ushered him into a room where certain preparations had been made to receive him. There were two arm-chairs and two lighted lamps. "You wish me to sign a declaration, I presume?" said the prince.

"A little later on," answered Jolras. "I wish to ask a few questions first."

"Which I will willingly answer on condition that you will answer to mine. Xénia was murdered, was she not?"

"Yes, and in the strangest way. Her head was cut off with a sword. Her garments were removed; her body was placed in a sack and found on the bank of the Seine at about three o'clock last Sunday morning."

"Then you do not know by whom the crime was committed?"

"We are on the track of the murderers; and, by the way, supposing I told you they were two of your servants?"

"Which of them?" asked the prince.

"A coach man named Stephane, and a groom named Vacili."

"They are not my servants—they are my wife's."

"Do you mean to imply that the murderers obeyed an order given them by the princess?" asked Jolras, quickly.

"Not in the least. The princess was very much attached to Xénia; why should she wish to lose the services of so devoted a servant? Those two scoundrels are quite capable of having murdered the girl, either, namely, to rob her or to get rid of her. She was greatly in their way. And if you suspected them, I am amazed that they are not under arrest."

"I thought it best to question you first."

"I am indebted for the attention, but I can give you no information. I have no authority over them, and I seldom see them."

"You did not call for them last week, late on Saturday night, or early on Sunday morning?"

"Who suggested that to you? Was it a man who calls himself Disney? It must have been he. I had an idea that the fellow belonged to the detective service, and I see now that I was right. I dismissed him from my presence to-day, but he was still with me when my wife came to reproach me for having employed her coachman and footman. She left Paris that Saturday night, and there was no one to drive her to the station, she said. I told her she was mistaken, but she would not be convinced. She preferred to believe what those two sots offered as excuses. I myself thought that they had spent the night in some wine-shop. But it is possible that they spent it perpetrating a crime."

"Will you tell me where *you* were that Saturday evening?"

"Upon my word, that is an embarrassing question. I seldom

go out, but if I do I don't tax my memory as to dates. Still it seems to me that I dined at the club that night with four of my compatriots. After dinner we played till dawn, and I recollect now, that at least twenty members looked on at the game."

"Their testimony will be quite enough."

"Do you suspect me then?" asked the prince, laughing. "Do you think that I employed these men to murder Xénia; or stay, perhaps you think I did it myself?" Jolras shook his head. "You think then," continued the prince, "that I merely gave the orders. In that case, allow me to ask what my presence at the club would prove? That would not show my innocence. I could have paid my men and let them do their work without me."

This was said with such calmness that Jolras realised that another mistake had certainly been made. Two hours previously he had received a visit from Piédouche, who had related his conversation with the princess, and the conjugal scene that had preceded this conversation. Jolras then became convinced that the prince was the real criminal, and it was determined to act immediately, by bringing Yalta suddenly face to face with Xénia's body. However, the prince's attitude had not proved to be that of a criminal; his present tone disconcerted Jolras; and Piédouche, concealed in a room next to the clerk's office, was overwhelmed with disgust while he listened to the clear statements made by the accused.

"Come," continued the prince in an easy tone, "this is rather ridiculous. I had no reason to wish poor Xénia any harm; she had always been the most docile of servants. I liked her, and the princess was her best friend. Still the other servants did not like her, and I should not be surprised if she was really murdered by the scoundrels you name. Stephane was a butcher in his youth, and Vacili would stop at nothing. The sabre was used by Stephane; I am sure of that. Arrest these men and put them to torture if you like until they confess their crime. I will relinquish them to you, and I feel sure that my wife will not interfere. However, I suppose that you have no further questions to ask of me, and that I am at liberty to return home. I promise you that I will not give the servants a hint. I will not even speak of the affair to the princess. You may send your agents at once to the house, only bid them do their work as quietly as possible. Good evening, sir. How does one get out of this place, pray?"

Jolras did not venture to detain the prince, for to prevent his departure he would have been compelled to arrest him, and his recent mistakes had tended to make him cautious. So he conducted the prince to the quay, and even offered to put the administrative carriage at his disposal, but the Muscovite declared that he preferred to walk. As Jolras bade the prince good-night, he said to himself: "Piédouche is an ass! But for him I should have arrested that coachman and footman long ago!"

VII.

AFTER the prince's departure with M. Jolras, Edmond was left in a most uncomfortable state of mind. The singular things the Russian had said greatly disturbed him. Evidently this husband had strong reasons for wishing to get rid of his wife. He had so far closed his eyes to her misconduct, but some unexpected incident which had taken place had decided him to have nothing more to do with her. The more Edmond reflected, the more M. Jolras's visit seemed to indicate that the prince and princess were involved in the crime which Duroc had been accused of. The official from the Prefecture of Police had requested the prince to come and identify a woman of his household named Xénia. Now, to identify is an elastic expression. A person who has been arrested may be identified—a dead body may also be identified. All these deductions were logical, and Edmond, recalling his conversation with the descendant of the Khans of the Crimea, arrived at the conclusion that the princess was involved in the affair of the headless woman, who could be none other than her maid. Her husband probably knew that it was by her orders that this unfortunate girl, Xénia, had been killed, and in forcing her to leave Paris he hoped to save her from a criminal prosecution. To urge her to fly he had resorted to the intervention of her lover. He despised entire humanity to that degree that he had not the smallest doubt but what he should find this lover ready to share the exile and the fortune of a woman who had millions in foreign banks, and at the same time this odious murder on her conscience. The prince's conduct, in making this suggestion, disgusted Edmond, still he resolved to profit by it, to bring the princess to terms. If, as he feared, she had not yet taken steps to free Eric, he could force her to do so by threatening her with exposure.

The young fellow now had only just time to dress and dine before proceeding to the Rue de Tilsitt, in accordance with previous arrangements, and he had just finished dressing when the doorkeeper came up with a letter, and also stated that a lady wished to see him. Edmond expected no one, and, above all, no lady. He accordingly thought of sending word that he had gone out, but before dismissing the doorkeeper with this message, he looked at the direction of the letter in his hand and saw that it came from Laure. It needed nothing more to make him forget the stranger who wished to speak to him. He tore open the envelope and saw that instead of one letter it contained two. The first was from Laure. "My memory has returned to me," she wrote, "and I recall a matter

which you may utilise if you deem it advisable when you see the Princess Yalta. If she refuses to certify my brother's innocence, ask her where she went when she left Paris a few days ago. And when she has answered you, you can, if you like, read to her the lines that I have underscored in the letter which I enclose."

This was all, and Edmond could not understand the meaning until he had read the other letter. He was about to do so when a woman, closely veiled, appeared on the landing. The carpet had softened the noise of her footsteps, and she was standing before Edmond ere he knew that she had ascended the stairs.

"I did not wish to give my name, but I thought that you would not receive me without knowing who I was," she said.

Edmond recognised the voice of the Princess Yalta. This visit was most unexpected, but not unwelcome, since he was eager to begin the contest; besides, he felt that in his own apartment he would be on less dangerous ground. "Very good," he said to the doorkeeper, "I am not at home to any one."

And he turned to the princess and showed her into the room where he had received her husband not an hour before. She wore a travelling dress, the same that she had worn on the previous evening when Jolras and Piédouche had surprised her examining the Byzantine cabinet, and at her belt hung the famous Russian leather satchel in which she could place so many rolls of bank-notes. Edmond crushed Laure's letters in his hand, and waited with ill-concealed emotion for the princess to open fire. She sat down, lifted her veil and with her eyes fixed on his she said, "I could not go away without seeing you again, for I leave Paris at a quarter past eight."

"Well, what have you done for Eric?"

"Nothing at all. I have never once thought of him since this afternoon. And I am astonished that you take so much trouble on his behalf."

"I understood that you would not desert him, particularly as you had only to tell the truth to save him."

"I allowed you to indulge in that hope because I felt sure that you would in that case come to see me this evening. But as for Duroc he is well enough where he is. Let him stay there."

"Is that what you mean?" asked Edmond, white with rage. "Do you intend to leave France without troubling yourself as to the fate of the man you have ruined? Listen to me, I mean what I say when I swear that you shall not go."

The princess did not lower her eyes, but a faint smile dwelt upon her sensual lips. "I like to see you like that," she said in a caressing tone. "You are a man. If your friend had ever had any emotion like that by which you are now moved, I might have loved him, and I love *you*, enough now, to take pity on him for your sake. What do you wish me to do for him? Shall I write to the police that I asked Duroc to take this money and keep it for me until my return? I am willing to do so. I will even add, if you like, that he was to hand it to my broker to cover the risks of

a new speculation about which I intended to write to him. This is a most probable story which no one can disbelieve. However, dictate to me whatever you please."

"A falsehood more or less is of little consequence to you, I see. But, a letter won't be as good as a visit to the man I mentioned."

"A visit! Do you think I would call on such people? Besides, I leave in an hour's time."

Edmond felt that on this point the princess would not yield; and he asked himself how he should word this certificate so that it would inspire the police with entire confidence. "And so," he said, after a pause, "you consent to write in whatever terms I dictate?"

"Yes, on one condition, which I will tell you when you sit here on the sofa by my side," and the princess laid her hand on his.

Edmond carelessly released his hand, and rejoined: "I can hear you as well while I stand here. You offered a moment ago to affirm Eric's innocence in writing; and now you seem inclined to retract your promise. Pray explain yourself. What must I do to decide you to save him?"

"You must leave France with me. Oh! don't protest. I know what you are going to say. You are engaged to Laure Duroc, and you fancy that you are in love with her. But I promise to make you forget her. You can and will love me as I wish. Be quick for I must leave Paris this very night."

"What compels you to do so?" asked Edmond, looking her full in the face. "Are you afraid of being arrested?"

"Why should I be arrested? I am not Duroc's accomplice. The money he took was my own. I don't think I shall be accused of robbing myself."

"The prince was here an hour ago."

"Ah! and why did he come?"

"He came to tell me that if you do not leave Paris at once he will ask for a divorce, which the Russian tribunals will grant him at once. In that case you will lose your great wealth."

"That doesn't matter. I have letters of credit for four millions of francs on New York and Calcutta. I have also five millions' worth of diamonds. What do I care for the revenues I leave behind me? They may confiscate my estates in Russia, and the house in the Rue de Tilsitt. I shall still be very wealthy."

"Your husband added that if you consent to disappear forever, he will leave you your income, and will never disturb you."

"I am greatly obliged to him for his generous indulgence; but I should like to know why he so particularly wishes to get rid of me?"

"To prevent your arrest. Do you know that he has been summoned to identify the body of your missing maid?"

"That is to say a body supposed to be hers. The man you pointed out to me, when we entered my courtyard, has told me that he suspects my husband of having killed this poor girl, who served me with unequalled devotion. I have no idea on what this strange accusation is founded—nor do I much care; it is nothing to me."

"Then you flatter yourself that when the prince is exonerated, the police will not turn upon you? Your husband indulges in no illusion. He knows that your maid was killed by two of your other servants, and that it was at your command she was killed."

"Did he tell you that?" asked Nadèje, haughtily.

"No, I guessed it. He does not wish to denounce you because your disgrace would bring shame upon his name, but he wishes you to disappear and to avoid arrest, and he was so mistaken in me that he fancied I should be willing to go with you."

"You have more imagination than shrewdness," said the princess, rising from the sofa, where Edmond had resolutely refused to seat himself beside her. "You improvise a romance with marvellous facility, but you are completely in error as to the motives of my husband. In any case he will be satisfied. I shall leave in less than an hour's time, and neither you nor he will ever see me again."

"Very good. Now you will write what I dictate," said Edmond, going to the table.

"I shall write nothing whatever."

"You refuse to write that Duroc is not a thief?"

"I shall do better than that. In a few days' time the police will receive a letter, in which I shall tell them that I placed the three hundred thousand francs in a drawer merely to test the honesty of Duroc, and that he took the money as I had foreseen."

This was too much for Edmond. "Is it possible," he cried, choking with wrath, "that you have the audacity to threaten when you ought to go down on your knees and implore me to spare you? I swear, however, that the infamous act you contemplate shall never be accomplished, for you shall not leave Paris. I will hand you over to the police for having committed or instigated a murder."

"Ah!" sneered the princess. "What a gentlemanly proceeding!"

"I shall inform Monsieur Jolras that I have prevented your departure, and that you are here. He has been closeted with your husband for some time, and knows what to do. Xénia was killed either by your orders or the prince's, and I am inclined to believe that Monsieur Jolras, who came here to question your husband, will be only too glad to come again to question you."

"It would be much simpler to take me to him. In that way, too, I should be the sooner relieved of your presence."

"You shall not leave this house, and I swear to you that you shall repent of having refused to save Duroc. I shall save him now without your help, and you will not escape punishment."

"You really think that? Tell me, if you can, how you can prove that I ordered the murder of a girl who was warmly attached to me, and who is perhaps still living, for I myself do not believe her to be dead? Your friend of the police told me of a headless body found on the bank of the Seine."

"This body was in a sack carried by a man who was seen to leave a brougham belonging to you. Your people will speak when they are arrested ; they will confess who paid them for this crime."

"My people ! Whom do you mean ? My coachman and footman, eh ? Well, I dismissed them an hour ago, and they will never enter the house again. The rascals made a night of it on the evening I left Paris, and I was compelled to go to the station in my husband's brougham."

"That night Eric was expecting you. Your maid took him a letter from you."

"He told you about it, eh ? Well, yes ; I gave a note to Xénia, and since then she has not been seen. He, also, might be accused of having murdered her."

Edmond started. He perceived a new danger, of which he had not previously thought. This woman would not hesitate to commit any infamy to defend herself. The Princess Yalta, who was stealthily watching his face, now coldly exclaimed : "Believe me, it would be much better to renounce this ridiculous project. You will make me lose my train if you send for your friends at the prefecture, and you will be laughed at for your pains. Let me go in peace ; I will forget the wrong you have done me."

"Will you write that letter as I require ?" asked Edmond.

"No, positively no. All that I can promise is not to write as I threatened you to do."

Edmond bit his lip. Suddenly, however, he remembered the advice given him by Laure in her letter, and which the princess's sudden arrival had made him forget. Laure had told him to ask the princess where she had gone when she left Paris on the preceding Saturday, and then to read the underlined passage in the letter she inclosed. He still held the letters in his hand, and, in despair of all other means, he determined to do as Laure had suggested ; but for fear of making a mistake, he resolved to read the inclosure first of all. He took up a candle, and while pretending to look for something, laid the letter on a table and read it. Nadèje had gone to the window, to assure herself that her cab was still waiting, for she thought she had gained her cause. When she returned to the table, Edmond had folded the letter again, and he now said :

"Very well, we will say no more of Eric. Only oblige me by telling me where you were while he was weeping on account of your absence."

"Weeping on account of my absence, do you say ?" cried the princess. "Ah ! I see that you know him well. Now that you adopt a different tone with me, I am quite willing to answer your question. As you are not a commissary of police, I don't mind telling you that I left Paris that Saturday night, without much caring where I went. I had thought of going to Havre, but I missed the half-past twelve train. Then I thought of the country. I drove to Versailles in my husband's brougham, and had the pleasure of laming one of his horses. At Versailles I slept at a

hotel. I like that sort of life—going off in an unpremeditated way, and stopping wherever I please. Then I remembered that last year I purchased a château in Brittany, and that the heather must be all in bloom there. I took the express for Brest the next day, and at eleven the same evening I reached my château, which is near Saint-Pol-de-Léon.”

“Near Saint-Pol-de-Léon !” repeated Edmond. “On the sea-shore, I presume ?”

“Yes. On a cliff against which the waves beat. It was the wildness of the site that decided me to purchase a dilapidated old building, inhabited for twenty years by owls. The last owners deserted it on account of a crime committed there. A farm-servant killed a girl whom he had loved there, and it was said that her ghost haunted the place. I had always wanted to see a ghost, and the legend tempted me. Unfortunately, I never met the smallest phantom in my castle by the sea, although I spent a month there last summer. I wanted Duroc to go with me, but he refused.”

“But you remained there on this occasion until you returned to Paris ?” asked Edmond de Chemazé, breathless with emotion.

“No ; I soon found it too cold there, and the meadows seemed melancholy so early in the season. So I only slept one night in my dilapidated château, and the next day I went to Morlaix, where I took a little steamer to Plymouth. I afterwards spent five or six days in London, where I was bored to death, and then returned to France by the boat from Dover to Calais. Come, if you like we will take a longer and much more interesting journey than that trip of mine to Brittany. To-morrow I shall be at Marseilles on my way to Japan, which is a most charming country. A sky that is always blue, and the most exquisite flowers—a very land of love !”

“Shall I tell you why you went to Brittany ?” said Edmond, interrupting her. “You went there to dispose of the head of the woman you murdered.”

The princess turned deadly pale, and replied in a hoarse voice : “You are mad !”

“Listen to this letter, written from Roscoff, a little port that you must know, as it is not far from your château.” Edmond still held the letter that Laure had inclosed in her own, and he now read a part of it aloud : “‘I must tell you of a most horrible affair that has caused a great excitement throughout the whole district. Yesterday, while some fishermen were taking in their nets, they hauled up a milliner’s box, and on opening it, found that it contained a woman’s head. Was it not horrible ? But don’t imagine for a moment that this crime was committed by our dear Bretons. The woman was entirely unknown about here. She was young, and, although her features were changed by the water, it is said that there were still traces of remarkable beauty. Her hair was of a peculiar tint, very fair, and may lead to her recognition.’”

The princess listened attentively, and when Edmond stopped reading, she did not speak a single word, but gazed at him earnestly,

and waited for him to speak. "Do you understand now," he said, "that you are at my mercy?"

"And why, pray? Because a young girl in writing to your betrothed tells her some vulgar story? for I readily understand that was written to Mademoiselle Duroc by some boarding-school friend. Do you suppose I have anything to do with it?"

"No matter what I think, Jolras will soon be in a position to prove that this head, found a hundred and fifty leagues from Paris, is the head of your waiting-maid! And it will be known that you went to Brittany? You were seen at Morlaix, and there are servants at your château, I presume. They will be examined, they will say that you spent a night there, and that during that night you went out alone—and wandered about until you found a rock overhanging the sea, whence you threw into the water the box that you had the horrible courage to take about with you—"

"Enough!" cried Nadèje. "What do you exact from me?"

"A confession first."

"Very well. I confess that I condemned a slave who betrayed me, to death, and that she was executed without pity."

"Betrayed you? How could she betray you?"

"She sold my secrets to my husband who had seduced her."

"What of that? You were not jealous of him?"

"Of him? No; but this girl belonged to me; she was my slave, and I did not choose that anyone should meddle with her. She knew the risk she ran, and quietly submitted to the punishment which she felt she deserved."

Edmond shuddered. One would have said that this woman took pride in showing herself as she was, ferocious and depraved, like an Empress of Rome in the time of the Cæsars. "Will you dare to talk like this to the judge who will examine you?" he asked, as he looked at her, steadily.

"None will examine me," she replied. "I have a poison that kills like a lightning flash about me. If you call in the police, I shall be dead before they can touch me. Your friend will be tried instead of me, for I shall say he assisted me in murdering Xénia."

Edmond started forward, and raised his hand involuntarily. "Kill me, if you dare," she said. "My vengeance will then be complete, for you will be tried for murder!" He thought of Laure and restrained himself. "Will you write?" he asked.

"Ah! you yield then?" she answered; "for I swear to you that I don't care whether I live or die, providing I avenge myself. And so," she continued, "if I consent to write that Duroc took this money in order to restore it to me, you will let me go?"

"No; I exact more now. I wish you to write a confession of your crime, for use, in case you should take it into your head to carry out a threat you made a little time ago. You said that when you were in safety, you would denounce Eric Duroc as having stolen the money he took, and you are quite capable of doing so."

"Very good. But who will guarantee me that you will not

take advantage of this declaration, and have me arrested as soon as the paper is in your possession?"

"I can only give you my word, which will be, I think, quite enough, for you know me to be a man of honour."

The princess started, her eyes flashed, and with unfeigned emotion, she murmured: "How I could have loved you!"

Edmond now pointed to an arm-chair near the table. She seated herself and took up a pen while he dictated: "On the point of leaving France forever, I have learnt that Monsieur Eric Duroc has been accused of taking a sum of money belonging to me. You are aware of my connection with Monsieur Duroc, and I desire to declare that he is quite above reproach. He has often had in his possession money of mine, which he has always accounted for, and much larger amounts than the one he is accused of stealing. I had, and still have, the most absolute confidence in him. He took this money, which I had placed in a drawer and forgotten, with the intention, no doubt, of giving it to my broker as cover for future speculations. I wish it to be handed to my broker, to be held by him till my return to France; and I desire that Monsieur Duroc may be at once set at liberty."

Edmond added a few formal words to the above, and then the princess wrote the address on an envelope. "When shall you be beyond pursuit?" asked the young man.

"To-morrow morning."

"This letter will be posted to Monsieur Jolras at noon. Now where are the wretches who executed your orders?"

"Stephane and Vacili? Oh! to-morrow they will be in safety."

"That is all I wish to know. Now write this declaration." And Edmond dictated the following: "I, the Princess Yalta, here make confession of my crime. Feeling that I had the right to dispose of the life of my waiting-maid Xénia, I ordered her to be killed. The body was found in Paris and her head in the sea near a château which I own in Brittany. Monsieur Edmond de Chemazé exacted this declaration from me when he discovered my guilt, and when he could have had me arrested. He is at liberty to make such use of this confession as he thinks best. He will use it if at any time I should unjustly accuse his friend Eric Duroc, who is innocent of any crime whatever."

"Sign and date it," added Edmond, when she had finished.

The princess obeyed and then handed him both the letter and the confession. Edmond took them and read them attentively.

"That will do," he said, "you can go."

"And suppose I refuse to fly," replied the princess. "Suppose I should prefer to die rather than live in exile and alone?" Edmond did not reply. "Do you know what would happen if I killed myself here?" she asked. "I have an enormous sum of money about my person. It would be believed that you had killed me for it."

"I am not afraid of the charge," said the young man.

"I shall kill myself unless you tell me you do not despise me."

"I don't despise you. I hate you!"

"Why do you hate me? Is it because I wreaked justice upon a faithless slave! Or is it because it pleased me to break with a man whom I no longer cared for?"

"I hate you because you had no pity on Eric. Had you offered to save him by a spontaneous letter to Jolras, I think I should have forgotten that you had committed a crime."

"I cannot bear your hatred any better than your contempt. I love you and I die!"

Najède held in her right hand a tiny crystal phial. She was carrying it to her lips, when Edmond hastily clutched hold of her arm and tore the bottle from her.

"You wish me to live?" she cried. "I will live then, only to curse you. Go and find this man to whom you sacrifice me, and marry the pretty simpleton who denounced me to you. A day will come when you will bitterly regret not having followed me, and you will laugh at the scruples which chained you to the dull life that awaits you. You fancy that you are in love, and you believe that you will secure your happiness by marriage with a silly girl. Happiness is freedom—freedom for the indulgence of each caprice—freedom to brave the law and crush your enemies. Happiness may even be found in crime, let me tell you, sir. Society encompasses you with its stupid morality, but I have measured you, and I know that you will throw aside your chains. But it will then be too late. I shall be at the antipodes, and should I ever return it would be only to revenge myself on you. But listen there is yet time. Come with me to the East, to India—to Central Asia. There we will buy subjects and reign over troops of slaves. We can dispose of their lives as we please, without any stupid judge demanding an account of our acts—"

"You are mad!" cried Edmond, interrupting her. "And hark?" he added, as a vehicle drew up at the door of the house. "The officials have come to arrest you. You have only just time to escape!"

She hesitated for a moment; but suddenly she turned and fled, saying as she did so: "My curse attends you! I go, but I shall pursue you with my hatred, and if ever misfortune comes to you and to those who love you, think of Nadège!"

He did not detain her, indeed, he was glad to have done with this horrible creature. At last Eric was saved, and Edmond now wished to announce the happy news to Laure. He had put on his hat, and he was opening his door, when to his surprise, he found himself face to face with Eric Duroc.

"Free! Free at last!" cried Edmond.

"Yes," answered Eric, bitterly. "They liberated me with many apologies. You did not expect to see me so soon, perhaps?"

"No, but I was sure that you would be released to-morrow, and I was about to go and tell your sister so."

"I have just seen her. It was she who sent me here. What have you done since those fools arrested me?"

"I notified the broker that you would be away for several days ; and no one knows what has happened to you."

"And the princess has come back, hasn't she ?"

"Is it possible that you still think about that woman !" cried Edmond. He held the two letters written by Nadèje, and the phial of poison still stood on the table.

"Well, I presume that I am indebted for my release to her," resumed Eric. "You are aware of what I was accused—robbery, but the officials have seen the princess, I imagine, and she has spoken in my favour. I would go at once and thank her, if I were at all sure of finding her at home."

"You are mistaken," he said. "The princess has done all in her power to ruin you. She would have written to the Prefect of Police that you were a thief, if someone had not prevented her from doing so. But were you not also accused of murder ?"

"I believe so, but I never heard anything more of that charge."

"No, for the person you were supposed to have murdered suddenly reappeared. But it wasn't her fault if you were not accused of murdering her waiting-maid, Xénia, who was killed in that same house where you found that money."

"Xénia killed ! What does that mean ?"

"She was beheaded. Her body was sewn up in a sack, and just as it was to be thrown into the Seine, the man who carried it was frightened, and dropped it."

"Who committed the murder ?"

"Two men whom you know very well—the princess's servants, Stephane and Vacili. They acted in obedience to her orders, and perpetrated the crime in the house which you visited so often. But read this," added Edmond, presenting Eric with the Princess Morphine's confession. Eric turned pale as he read it ; so pale that Edmond thought he was about to faint.

"Where was this written ?" Duroc gasped at last.

"Here. I had her in my power ; and she purchased mercy from me, by signing another letter, exonerating you entirely. Fortunately, I do not need to use it as you are free."

"Is she suspected ?"

"I think so ; but I cannot be certain. Her husband, I know, is aware that his wife is guilty, but he will be silent on conditions that she never shows herself again in Russia or France. She leaves to-night, taking millions away with her, and she will go to the end of the world. She knows perfectly well what awaits her if she breaks our treaty."

There came a long silence. Eric was struggling with himself, and Edmond took advantage of his inattention to throw the phial of poison into the fire. "Then it was you who saved me ?" at last, asked Eric.

"No, it was your sister," answered Edmond, quickly ; and then, afraid that he had said too much, he added : "I thought of her while struggling with that terrible woman, and it was she who gave

me the courage to continue the contest, in which I more than once, despaired of victory."

"But you did conquer. So come and receive your reward."

"I ask none other than the satisfaction of having rescued you from the claws of that tigress."

"Come—Laure is waiting for you."

"Why did you not tell me that before?" cried Edmond.

"I wanted her to come here with me," said Eric, "but she was afraid. She is in the cab at the door downstairs. Come; but you won't say anything to her of course."

Edmond pressed his friend's hand, and they went downstairs together. It was at a cab door that the lovers met once more after their cruel suspense and anxiety. "Ah!" whispered Laure in Edmond's ear: "we have him once more, and now I forbid your returning to the Rue de Tilsitt."

Eric, who was dying of hunger, proposed that they should dine together at a restaurant. This was an excellent sign, and proved that the young man meant to do his best to drive away all painful recollections. It was as well, too, that he should show himself, so as to set any gossip at rest. Edmond was highly pleased at the proposal, and Laure made no objection; however, they both were surprised when Eric selected the Café des Ambassadeurs in the Champs Elysées. This quarter of Paris awakened many sad recollections in the minds of all three of them. "I wish to prove to you that the past is dead," whispered Eric in his friend's ear. "I can gaze without emotion at the house where I once met the princess so often, and at the mansion in the Rue de Tilsitt, where she lived. My experience has left me as hard as adamant."

On reaching the Café des Ambassadeurs, they selected a table in the common room, near an open window; and chance so placed them that shortly after they were seated, Eric and Edmond recognised the voice of a gentleman who was giving orders to a waiter outside. The table at which he sat was just under the open window, and the voice was that of Piédouche. The two young fellows recognised it instantly, but Laure, being less familiar with it, paid no attention to what was being said. "Put another chair to the table," Piédouche was saying; "I expect a friend. But you can serve me without waiting for him."

Whom did Piédouche expect? Edmond felt anxious on the point, and soon he heard the detective speak again. "Ah, here you are!" he said, "come, sit down. No one will know you here, and you are not dressed like a valet. So sit down and make your report. Monsieur Jolras will be here presently. When he comes you can give him your seat. But how did you find time to change your clothes? You have not come straight from the Rue de Tilsitt?"

"No, sir," answered the new-comer; "I have been home, for I hoped to find you there, for I thought after what took place to-day that your connection with this affair would end, and mine also."

"What are you saying? Your connection with it will end when I recall you, and as to my own it doesn't concern you."

"I know that, sir, only I have been dismissed."

"Who dismissed you? The majordomo? Ah! I see. The prince has been arrested, and no longer standing in fear of him the servants are doing as they please."

"But the prince isn't in prison, sir. It was he himself who dismissed me. And in such a way, too! My back aches now."

"What! Has the prince returned to the Rue de Tilsitt?"

"Yes, sir, and he sent for me and said to me: 'Be off with you, rascal. Go to the scoundrel who sent you here, and tell him how I treat spies.' With that he gave me a kick, sir."

"The princess must have denounced me then. I did not tell her, however, that you were in my service. She must have guessed it, and have spoken about it to her brute of a husband. It is a lesson to me never to trust a woman."

"But the princess has not seen the prince since the visit she paid him when you were present. She went away in a carriage an hour after you left."

"But the coachman and the footman are in jail, eh?"

"I don't know, sir. All I can tell you is that they left the house twenty minutes before the princess."

"Jolras has lost them then! It is too bad!"

"Here comes Monsieur Jolras, sir. He is looking for you."

"Fine use looking for me after perpetrating such blunders. But you had better go; it is not well that you should hear me rate him as he deserves. Go home. I myself will soon be there."

Dominique was glad to go off. He had a shrewd suspicion that his master was not about to be complimented, and he did not care to have his share of M. Jolras's lecture. The chief had caught sight of Piédouche in his corner, and came forward with his hat over his eyes, and a very sulky expression on his face. "Well," said Piédouche, as he pointed to the vacant chair, "what did that Cossack tell you to throw powder in your eyes? Didn't you show him Xénia's body? It seems that he returned home after I left him with you. But why do you look at me in that way?"

"Well," answered Jolras, "do you know that in this whole affair you have behaved with a simplicity that would disgrace a neophyte. You began by making us arrest an honest young fellow whom I have just set at liberty."

"It was I who advised you to do so."

"Your advice counted for nothing. I knew that he was innocent, and I only hope that he won't make a row. Unfortunately Prince Yalta won't hold *his* tongue. He will say far and wide that the French police are extremely silly. He demonstrated beyond a doubt that the girl could only have been killed by the footman and the coachman."

"I told you so."

"Yes; but you also said that you would take it upon yourself to

hand them over to us at the proper moment. As it happens, those scoundrels have disappeared."

"They can be easily caught."

"I am convinced of the contrary. Orders have been given, but if they escape, what then? We have done nothing but start false scents, and it is too late now to do anything. After accusing the prince you will end by accusing the princess."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Piédouche, "and I shouldn't be far wrong then. She has gone off as well!"

"You are quite free, sir, to follow her," said Jolras, rising, "but your services will no longer be required by the administration."

"And I can get on quite well by myself," answered Piédouche. "I am done for here. I cannot return to the Bourse, for I have been too terribly compromised by you. I shall go to England, my qualities will be properly appreciated there." This was all. M. Jolras walked away without condescending to reply.

Eric and Edmond exchanged glances. They understood everything now; the only outcome of the tragic affair in which they had been involved, would be the disappearance of the Princess Morphine. This was precisely what they desired.

The prince soon afterwards left France for the Caucasus, where he has since resided, surrounded by parasites. No Russian nobleman will associate with this savage, who lives between a chess-board and a bottle of brandy. The princess is in India, and it is said that she has married a rajah. As for Stephane, he strangled Vacili to obtain his share of the money given them by their mistress in payment of their crime, and he was hanged in England for this second murder. Piédouche, on his side, has gone to America, and there openly plies the calling of a detective. Dominique would not accompany him, but the Yankees believe in his cleverness, and the money he makes consoles him for his want of success in Paris.

Eric has awakened from his bad dream, and will soon be a licensed broker. Edmond de Chemazé has married Laure, and they are perfectly happy—as happy as lovers are in a fairy tale. As for M. Jolras, he learnt, when too late, that Xénia's head had been found on the coast of Brittany, not far from the chateau, belonging to Nadèje. But when he knew that, the Princess Morphine was already far beyond his reach.

Crown 8vo, 460 pages, in characteristic binding, price 6s.

THE CELEBRATED RUSSIAN REALISTIC NOVEL, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.

By FEDOR DOSTOIEFFSKY. AUTHOR OF "BURIED ALIVE."

Pronounced by the "Athenæum" to be "the most moving of all modern novels."

The *Athenæum* further says:—"The reader knows the personages—strange, grotesque, terrible personages they are—more intimately than if he had been years with them in the flesh. He is constrained to live their lives, to suffer their tortures, to scheme and resist with them, exult with them, weep and laugh and despair with them; he breathes the very breath of their strivings, and with the madness that comes upon them he is afflicted even as they. This sounds extravagant praise, no doubt; but only to those who have not read the volume. To those who have, we are sure that it will appear rather under the mark than otherwise."

A BOOK FOR THE PRESENT CRISIS.

In crown 8vo, price 1s.

IRISH HISTORY FOR ENGLISH READERS.

By WILLIAM STEPHENSON GREGG.

"The history is one that every Englishman *ought* to read. As an outline to be filled up by further reading it is an admirable little book."—*Literary World*.

In crown 8vo, with folding frontispiece, limp cover, price 2s. 6d.

MY FIRST CRIME.

By G. MACÉ, FORMER "CHEF DE LA SÛRETÉ" OF THE PARIS POLICE.

"An account by a real Lecoq of a real crime is a novelty among the mass of criminal novels with which the world has been favoured since the death of the great originator Gaboriau. It is to M. Macé, who has had to deal with real *juges d'instruction*, real *agents de la sûreté*, and real murderers, that we are indebted for this really interesting addition to a species of literature which has of late begun to pall."—*Saturday Review*.

THE BOULEVARD NOVELS.

Pictures of Paris Morals and Manners.

In small 8vo, attractively bound, price 2s. 6d. each.

NANA'S DAUGHTER. BY A. SIRVEN AND H. LEVERDIER.

THE YOUNG GUARD. BY VAST-RICOUARD.

THE WOMAN OF FIRE. BY ADOLPHE BELOT.

ODETTE'S MARRIAGE. BY ALPHONSE DELPIT.

BEAUTIFUL JULIE AND THE VIRGIN WIDOW. By

A. MATTHEY.

(B.)

In double volumes, bound in scarlet cloth, price 2s. 6d. each.

NEW EDITIONS OF THE
GABORIAU AND DU BOISGOBEY
SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

NOW READY

- 1.—THE MYSTERY OF ORCIVAL, AND THE GILDED CLIQUE.
- 2.—THE LEROUGE CASE, AND OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY.
- 3.—LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE.
- 4.—THE SLAVES OF PARIS.
- 5.—IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE, AND INTRIGUES OF A POISONER.
- 6.—DOSSIER NO. 113, AND THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES.
- 7.—THE COUNT'S MILLIONS.
- 8.—THE OLD AGE OF LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE.
- 9.—THE CATASTROPHE.
- 10.—THE DAY OF RECKONING.
- 11.—THE SEVERED HAND, AND IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.
- 12.—BERTHA'S SECRET, AND WHO DIED LAST?
- 13.—THE CRIME OF THE OPERA HOUSE.
- 14.—THE MATAPAN AFFAIR, AND A FIGHT FOR A FORTUNE.
- 15.—THE GOLDEN PIG, OR THE IDOL OF MODERN PARIS.
- 16.—THE THUMB STROKE, AND THE NAMELESS MAN.
- 17.—THE CORAL PIN.
- 18.—HIS GREAT REVENGE.

In small post 8vo, ornamental covers, 1s. each ; in cloth, 1s. 6d.

VIZETELLY'S POPULAR FRENCH NOVELS.

TRANSLATIONS OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF RECENT FRENCH
FICTION OF AN UNOBJECTIONABLE CHARACTER.

"They are books that may be safely left lying about where the ladies of the family can pick them up and read them. The interest they create is happily not of the vicious sort at all."

SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT.

FROMONT THE YOUNGER & RISLER THE ELDER. By
A. DAUDET.

"The series starts well with M. Alphonse Daudet's masterpiece."—Athenæum.

"A terrible story, powerful after a sledge-hammer fashion in some parts, and wonderfully tender, touching, and pathetic in others, the extraordinary popularity whereof may be inferred from the fact that this English version is said to be 'translated from the fiftieth French edition.'"—Illustrated London News.

SAMUEL BROHL AND PARTNER. By V CHERBULIEZ.

"Those who have read this singular story in the original need not be reminded of that supremely dramatic study of the man who lived two lives at once, even within himself. The reader's discovery of his double nature is one of the most cleverly managed of surprises, and Samuel Brohl's final dissolution of partnership with himself is a remarkable stroke of almost pathetic comedy."—The Graphic.

THE DRAMA OF THE RUE DE LA PAIX. By A. BELOT.

"A highly ingenious plot is developed in 'The Drama of the Rue de la Paix,' in which a decidedly interesting and thrilling narrative is told with great force and passion, relieved by sprightliness and tenderness."—Illustrated London News.

MAUGARS JUNIOR. By A. THEURIET.

"One of the most charming novelettes we have read for a long time."—Literary World.

WAYWARD DOSIA, & THE GENEROUS DIPLOMATIST

By HENRY GRÉVILLE.

"As epigrammatic as anything Lord Beaconsfield has ever written."—*Hampshire Telegraph*.

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE, & SAVING A DAUGHTER'S DOWRY. By E. ABOUT.

"'A New Lease of Life' is an absorbing story, the interest of which is kept up to the very end."—*Dublin Evening Mail*.

"The story, as a flight of brilliant and eccentric imagination, is unequalled in its peculiar way."—*The Graphic*.

COLOMBA, & CARMEN. By P. MÉRIMÉE.

"The freshness and raciness of 'Colomba' is quite cheering after the stereotyped three-volume novels with which our circulating libraries are crammed."—*Halifax Times*.

"'Carmen' will be welcomed by the lovers of the sprightly and tuneful opera the heroine of which Minnie Hauk made so popular. It is a bright and vivacious story."—*Life*.

A WOMAN'S DIARY, & THE LITTLE COUNTESS. By O. FEUILLET.

"Is wrought out with masterly skill and affords reading, which although of a slightly sensational kind, cannot be said to be hurtful either mentally or morally."—*Dumbarton Herald*.

BLUE-EYED META HOLDENIS, & A STROKE OF DIPLOMACY. By V. CHERBULIEZ.

"'Blue-eyed Meta Holdenis' is a delightful tale."—*Civil Service Gazette*.

"'A Stroke of Diplomacy' is a bright vivacious story pleasantly told."—*Hampshire Advertiser*.

THE GODSON OF A MARQUIS. By A. THEURIET.

"The rustic personages, the rural scenery and life in the forest country of Argonne, are painted with the hand of a master. From the beginning to the close the interest of the story never flags."—*Life*.

THE TOWER OF PERCEMONT & MARIANNE. By GEORGE SAND.

"George Sand has a great name, and the 'Tower of Percemont' is not unworthy of it."—*Illustrated London News*.

THE LOW-BORN LOVER'S REVENGE. By V. CHERBULIEZ.

"'The Low-born Lover's Revenge' is one of M. Cherbuliez's many exquisitely written productions. The studies of human nature under various influences, especially in the cases of the unhappy heroine and her low-born lover, are wonderfully effective."—*Illustrated London News*.

THE NOTARY'S NOSE, AND OTHER AMUSING STORIES. By E. ABOUT.

"Crisp and bright, full of movement and interest."—*Brighton Herald*.

DOCTOR CLAUDE, OR, LOVE RENDERED DESPERATE. By H. MALOT. Two vols.

"We have to appeal to our very first flight of novelists to find anything so artistic in English romance as these books."—*Dublin Evening Mail*.

THE THREE RED KNIGHTS, OR, THE BROTHERS' VENGEANCE. By P. FÉVAL.

"The one thing that strikes us in these stories is the marvellous dramatic skill of the writers."—*Sheffield Independent*.

BEECHAM'S PILLS

Are admitted by thousands to be worth above a Guinea a Box for Bilious and Nervous Disorders, such as Wind and Pain in the Stomach, Sick Headache, Giddiness, Fulness and Swelling after Meals, Dizziness and Drowsiness, Cold Chills, Flushings of Heat, Loss of Appetite, Shortness of Breath, Costiveness, Scurvy, Blotches on the Skin, Disturbed Sleep, Frightful Dreams, and all Nervous and Trembling Sensations, &c. The first dose will give relief in twenty minutes. This is no fiction, for they have done it in thousands of cases. Every sufferer is earnestly invited to try one box of these Pills, and they will be acknowledged to be

Worth a Guinea a Box.

For females of all ages these Pills are invaluable, as a few doses of them carry off all humours, and bring about all that is required. No female should be without them. There is no medicine to be found to equal

BEECHAM'S PILLS

for removing any obstruction or irregularity of the system. If taken according to the directions given with each box they will soon restore females of all ages to sound and robust health.

For a weak stomach, impaired digestion, and all disorders of the liver they act like "Magic," and a few doses will be found to work wonders upon the most important organs of the human machine. They strengthen the whole muscular system, restore the long-lost complexion, bring back the keen edge of appetite, and arouse into action, with the Rosebud of Health, the whole physical energy of the human frame. These are "facts" admitted by thousands, embracing all classes of society, and one of the best guarantees to the Nervous and Debilitated is

**BEECHAM'S PILLS have the Largest
Sale of any Patent Medicine in the World.**

Full directions are given with each Box.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers in the United Kingdom, in Boxes at
13½d. and 2s. 9d. each.

